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THE HOLY GOSPELS

PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

ON EVERY VERSE OF

THE NEW TESTAMENT FROM

ACTS TO REVELATION

Bible, N.T. English

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PRACTICAL REFLECTIONS

ON EVERY VERSE OF

THE NEW TESTAMENT

BY A CLERGYMAN

With a Preface

BY H. P. LIDDON, D.D., D.C.L.

CANON AND CHANCELLOR OF ST. PAUL'S

SECOND SERIES

ACTS TO REVELATION

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[Second Edition]

"Quid ergo docuerunt vel docent nos Apostoli sancti? Non piscatoriam artem, non scenofactoriam, vel quicquid hujusmodi est. Non Platonem legere, non Aristotelis versutias inversare, non semper discere et nunquam ad veritatis scientiam pervenire. Docuerunt me vivere. Putas, parva res est scire vivere? Magnum aliquid, immo maximum est."—BERNARD (in Festo SS. Petri et Pauli, Serm. i.).

"Conversus Paulus conversionis minister factus est universo mundo. Et multos quidem olim in carne adhuc sed non jam secundum carnem ambulans praedicationis officio convertit ad Deum. Nunc quoque in Ipso felicius vivens, et apud Ipsum, ne adhuc quidem cessat ab hominum conversione: dico autem exemplo, oratione, doctrina."—BERNARD (in Conversione S. Pauli, Serm. i.).

"Multa in Divinarum reperisse mihi videor serie Scripturarum verba hominum qui liberatos se esse non sine multa admiratione laetantur, verba perfectae securitatis et felicitatis immensa, vocem gratiarum actionis et laetitiae."—BERNARD (in Fest. Omn. Sanct., Serm. ii.).

TO THE

VEN. JAMES LESLIE RANDALL, M.A.

ARCHDEACON OF BUCKINGHAM

THESE REFLECTIONS UPON THE LATTER PART OF THE NEW TESTAMENT

ARE INSCRIBED

IN ACKNOWLEDGMENT OF HIS GREAT KINDNESS

AND ADMIRABLE EXAMPLE.

(RECALL)
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Preface.

THE following commentary, it is believed, will be found to carry out with respect to the latter part of the New Testament the principle which has already been applied to the Holy Gospels. That principle is to seek to extract from the sacred text personal improvement, warning, encouragement, edification, as distinct from any of the many other uses which may undeniably be made of it. The writer of the commentary does not forget that of the Epistles two at least—those to the Romans and to the Hebrews—are elaborate theological treatises, which can only be understood when they are studied as a whole, and when the thread of the argument which connects their several parts is distinctly apprehended by the reader. But their logical or theological completeness is not the only aspect which these great Epistles present to Christendom; and in seeking to gather from each verse some lesson which may help Christian souls along their journey to the eternal world, the commentator is, to say the least, not out of sympathy with the purpose of the great Apostle. It is as true of the New Testament as S. Paul tells us it is of the Old, that all Scripture is profitable for “reproof, for

correction, for instruction in righteousness;”¹ and indeed these aspects of the Written Word of God can be less safely lost sight of than some others which are prominent in many modern commentaries.

That this second effort to promote the glory of our Divine Redeemer and the good of souls for which He died, may be abundantly blessed, must be the prayer in which the readers of the volume will assuredly join with its author and with the present writer.

H. P. LIDDON.

3 AMEN COURT, E.C.

August 1883.

¹ 2 Tim. iii. 16.

Advertisement.

ONE objection that may be made to a fresh commentary on Holy Scripture, and the answer to that objection, may be well stated in the words of an old divine : “ Sed dicet aliquis, ‘ Jam satis est quod alii meliores et sanctiores nihilominus et doctiores invenerunt atque scripserunt : illicitum est, temerarium est, adjicere quipiam ad ea quae a Catholicis patribus dicta sunt, atque ita fastidium legentibus facere augendo multitudines commentariorum ;’—ad haec inquam, ‘ Nimum sanctorum spacioſus ager Scripturarum omnibus Christi confessoribus communis est, et tractandi illas nullo jure negari potest licentia, dummodo salva fide quis quod sentit, dicat aut scribat. Quis namque recte indignetur eō quod in eadem possessione, post unum aut duos puteos, quos foderunt patres praecedentes, plures proprio fodiant labore filii succedentes ?’”—(Rupertus Tuitiensis *in Apocal.*) But the compiler desires that those who use this particular commentary should not expect to find in it anything original, for all the reflections are drawn from other writers, either literally or in substance : nor anything deep, for all that is given is simple, meant for common ordinary Christians who cannot go very far into the meaning of Scripture : nor anything complete, for he in no case professes to give the whole drift of a passage, nor the different renderings that may be made of it, nor all the lessons to be drawn

from it. Often he has been compelled deliberately to put aside the deepest and most important meanings as being too large for his method of treatment. He has endeavoured to avoid all critical questions and subjects of controversy as being outside the scope of his work. He is aware that a book of this kind, being, by its very nature, imperfect or defective, requires a charitable construction. In the *Reflexions Morales* of Quesnel, upon which this book has been modelled throughout, the Papal scrutiny discerned no less than one hundred and one "blasphemous, heretical, and dangerous" positions. Nor can the present writer be sure that many of his Reflections, taken by themselves, may not offer equal mark for condemnation. He can only say that he nowhere proposes to give the complete explanation of a passage, and he desires that all the Reflections be taken as subordinate to the text of Scripture which they are meant to illustrate, and in harmony with the doctrines of grace as held by the Church. Taken with this proviso, he believes that even the simple and almost commonplace thoughts which he has gathered together from many sources may prove serviceable to some Christians, as helping to introduce them into the meaning of the verses which they read, and to raise in their minds dispositions suitable to the great truths and facts which those verses unfold.

THE ACTS OF THE APOSTLES.

CHAPTER I.

1. Christ, preparing his apostles to the beholding of his ascension. gathereth them together into the mount Olivet, commandeth them to expect in Jerusalem the sending down of the Holy Ghost, promiseth after few days to send it: by virtue whereof they should be witnesses unto him, even to the utmost parts of the earth. 9. After his ascension they are warned by two angels to depart, and to set their minds upon his second coming. 12. They accordingly return, and, giving themselves to prayer, choose Matthias apostle in the place of Judas.

THÉ former treatise have I made, O Theophilus, of all that Jesus began both to do and teach,

That treatise is the third Gospel. S. Luke has treasured up for us there all that shows our Lord's tender compassion for sinners, all the Christian hymns, all the chief parables of love and mercy. Christ's holy childhood, His prayers, His Agony, His Resurrection life, are revealed for us there more fully than elsewhere. Then S. Luke, under God's guidance, took up his pen again to relate what Christ had done for mankind after His Ascension, how He was still as full of power and mercy as before, how He had fulfilled His promises and sent His apostles throughout the world. This Book of the Acts gives us an account of Christ Jesus working in the Church, as the Gospel did of His personal work amongst men.

2. Until the day in which he was taken up, after that he through the Holy Ghost had given commandments unto the apostles whom he had chosen:

What were these commandments? He told them to preach the Gospel, to baptize in the Name of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, to tell all nations of pardon and forgiveness. He would have His servants diligent to obey Him. The apostleship was no mere dignity, it brought with it great tasks to perform for a Divine Master. All Thy servants, O Lord, have work to do for Thee. Grant that I may reverently listen to Thy commandments for myself, and set about fulfilling them heartily.

3. To whom also he shewed himself alive after his passion

by many infallible proofs, being seen of them forty days, and speaking of the things pertaining to the kingdom of God:

These were the great forty days in which Christ gave His apostles the outline of His Church ; days full of mystery, for He only appeared to them now and then, and passed away suddenly as He came ; days of fear, as they were awed at the strangeness of His Resurrection life and scarcely dared to believe that it was Himself again ; but days also of hope and joy and enlightenment, as they perceived more fully His Divine glory, and the work He had for them to do.

4. And, being assembled together with them, commanded them that they should not depart from Jerusalem, but wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me.

They had heard of a Guide, a Comforter, a Teacher Who should come and dwell within them, a Power from on high that would strengthen them. Their own great frailty and the immensity of the task they had to fulfil must have driven them to seek earnestly for the promised help. Lord, what should we in our day do without Thy promise ? Fulfil it, we beseech Thee, in us. We are but frail earth and miserable sinners apart from Thy grace.

5. For John truly baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence.

This was an inward baptism that they looked for, not with the outward element of water, but with an inward flood of strength, and joy, and peace. It was this outpouring that made them strong to overcome the world. It did not destroy their natural characters, but subdued them to do Christ's work. This it was that changed them from what they had been into saints and apostles.

6. When they therefore were come together, they asked of him, saying, Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel ?

They still dreamt of an earthly kingdom which should be set up at Jerusalem and make Israel great again among the nations of the earth, but God's kingdom that He was going to establish was far wider and its benefits far greater than they thought of. There was still much for them to learn of their Master's plans.

7. And he said unto them, It is not for you to know the times or the seasons, which the Father hath put in his own power.

Christ had told them much, but He kept some things hidden. God's times and seasons are mostly out of our reach. We are apt to lose ourselves in inquiries about the future fulfilment of prophecy. Let us rather set ourselves to do cheerfully what He has commanded,

and await the manifestation of His Providences as He is pleased to unfold them. It is not for us to know much of the plans of Divine wisdom, but, thank God, we know enough for life and for death.

8. But ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you : and ye shall be witnesses unto me both in Jerusalem, and in all Judæa, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost part of the earth.

This verse tells us the contents of the whole Book of Acts. First we read how the disciples received power through the descent of the Holy Spirit ; then for some chapters how they bore witness of Christ in Jerusalem ; then how they went out into Judæa and Samaria ; and the last half of the book relates how they began to go out into the uttermost parts of the earth. Formerly they had been unable to stand firm, but now a heavenly power would be theirs which no dangers could overcome. Lord, make us sharers in it when our day comes to bear witness unto Thee.

9. And when he had spoken these things, while they beheld, he was taken up; and a cloud received him out of their sight.

What a glorious moment is this when God's Son ended His earthly manifestation ! Henceforth His Presence is spiritual. Faith and love behold Him. He works unseen for us on earth, and pleads for us in heaven. It was necessary that His visible presence should end in order that He might become an object to our faith, and that we might study the record of His words and acts now brought to a close. Glory be to God for having exhibited a Divine Pattern in the very midst of this sad and dark world. It is withdrawn again, yet we can cherish its memory.

10. And while they looked stedfastly toward heaven as he went up, behold, two men stood by them in white apparel;

Two of the heavenly choir remained behind on earth for a moment to instruct Christ's friends, while the rest received Him with songs of joy on His entrance again among them. When He came on earth they sung "Glory to God in the highest," and no less they must have rejoiced when He came back after doing such mighty acts.

11. Which also said, Ye men of Galilee, why stand ye gazing up into heaven? this same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven.

Jesus shall come again as He went up. His humanity, His love and mercy, His holiness, are not lost in the ages that have passed ; nay, in comparison with eternity all this while since the Ascension is

but a day. Faith passes from Christ's Ascension into heaven to His coming again to judge quick and dead. We must not stand too long gazing after Him, but set ourselves to get ready for His return.

12. Then returned they unto Jerusalem from the mount called Olivet, which is from Jerusalem a sabbath day's journey.

What a change from the Thursday before Easter to Ascension Day ! Six weeks ago the Lord Jesus had been in His agony somewhere on that same mount. It had been hallowed by His prayers, His Bloody Sweat, His apprehension ; all the long series of His sufferings had begun there, but now it is hallowed a second time by being made the threshold of His glory.

13. And when they were come in, they went up into an upper room, where abode both Peter, and James, and John, and Andrew, Philip, and Thomas, Bartholomew, and Matthew, James the son of Alphæus, and Simon Zelotes, and Judas the brother of James.

The saints gathered together for prayer in the upper room, that, probably, where the Last Supper had been. The world thought little of this assembly, yet here were those who were about to give it new life, who were to be the founders of the Catholic Church, whose names, and lives, and words were to be on believers' lips throughout the ages. Let us rejoice to honour God's saints and be found on their side.

14. These all continued with one accord in prayer and supplication, with the women, and Mary the mother of Jesus, and with his brethren.

What things about Christ the Lord were known to this holy company ! We only have small fragments of the knowledge that they enjoyed, yet we have eighteen centuries of Christian experience to draw from. We can see better than they could how fruitful our Saviour's life has been. God thus makes up to us for the loss of so many precious remembrances which they had then, and we have not. As members of the Catholic Church, we are in communion with Christ's holy Mother and His saints.

15. ¶ And in those days Peter stood up in the midst of the disciples, and said, (the number of names together were about an hundred and twenty,)

Christ the Lord had restored Peter from his great downfall and set him again in his great charge. He now began to carry out his Master's orders to strengthen his brethren and lay the foundations of the Church. No doubt the remembrance of his own frailty was ever present to his mind, yet it did not hinder him from rising up boldly and doing the Lord's work.

16. *Men and brethren, this scripture must needs have been fulfilled, which the Holy Ghost by the mouth of David spake before concerning Judas, which was guide to them that took Jesus.*

Certainly Scripture must needs be fulfilled, both in its blessings and its warnings. As the happiness of choosing God's side and remaining steadfast in it is fully set forth there, so also is the misery of forsaking Him. Be sure that what Scripture says about our sins finding us out, about the terrible consequences which we may bring on ourselves by wrongdoing, is all true and has been proved so.

17. *For he was numbered with us, and had obtained part of this ministry.*

What profit is it to be a priest, a communicant, a professing Christian, unless we live suitably to that holy calling? There must have been great capacities in Judas which led the all-seeing Lord to choose him into the apostolic company, and yet how he threw away all his opportunities. Let those who minister in God's house, or sing in choir, or draw near to the altar to communicate, reflect how many before them have been ruined through the very holiness of their employment.

18. *Now this man purchased a field with the reward of iniquity; and falling headlong, he burst asunder in the midst, and all his bowels gushed out.*

S. Matthew (xxvii. 5) had heard somewhat differently the particulars of Judas' end, yet all agreed it was sudden, miserable, and caused by his own despair. How strange that one of Christ's own chosen friends should perish thus! Can we believe in our own day that it is possible for high hopes, and fervent prayers, and devout communions to end in utter ruin of body and soul? Yes; if we do not keep guard against temptations, such things may be.

19. *And it was known unto all the dwellers at Jerusalem; insomuch as that field is called in their proper tongue, Acel-dama, that is to say, The field of blood.*

The field was called "The field of blood," for the innocent Blood whose price bought it, and for the traitor's blood which had stained it. Its name reminded the Jews of that precious Blood which they had rashly called down on their own heads. Yet we know, as many of them came to find out also, that that Blood has a healing virtue to wash away sins.

20. *For it is written in the book of Psalms, Let his habitation be desolate, and let no man dwell therein: and his bishoprick let another take.*

What did those imprecatory Psalms mean, which appear to call down ruin on offenders' heads? They were declarations of God's justice, at a time when His eternal Providence was scarcely revealed and the doom of unrighteousness was chiefly made known in this life by its consequences to the sinner himself and to his family. They declared God's hatred against evil; but they were also foreshadowings of the greater ruin which should come to them who, like Judas, sinned against the clearer light and love of God revealed in the Gospel.

21. Wherefore of these men which have companied with us all the time that the Lord Jesus went in and out among us, 22. beginning from the baptism of John, unto that same day that he was taken up from us, must one be ordained to be a witness with us of his resurrection.

What is the needful preparation to be a minister of Christ? This above all, to have an intimate knowledge of the Lord Himself. Such a one must have traced His holy footsteps, learned His doctrine, grieved over His sufferings, rejoiced in His glory. That is the most necessary of all qualifications. How could he bear witness unless he had himself experienced Who Christ is? Our message is about a Saviour Who has died for us and risen again; we have not indeed seen Him with our bodily eyes, yet His Word, His Church, and our own experience of His goodness suffice.

23. And they appointed two, Joseph called Barsabas, who was surnamed Justus, and Matthias.

Here are two saints who were much honoured in the Apostolic Church —one made an apostle, the other thought worthy to be so. Yet we never hear one word about either of them afterwards; their work, their devotion, their blessed end, though doubtless known in heaven, is wholly concealed from us here below. Scripture and Church history only disclose to us a very small fragment of all the gracious lives and holy deaths by which Christ has been glorified.

24. And they prayed, and said, Thou, Lord, which knowest the hearts of all men, shew whether of these two thou hast chosen,

"Thou, Lord, Which knowest the hearts of all men," art yet pleased in Thy sovereign wisdom to choose frail and foolish persons to be Thy ministers. All their follies and ignorances are open to Thee. We beseech Thee, strengthen in them what is weak, enlighten what is dark, cleanse what is foul; let their hearts be changed by Thy grace, that they may be powerful witnesses to Thee.

25. That he may take part of this ministry and apostleship, from which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place.

God will put each of us in our own place, that which we have become fit for. The place which Judas held for a while was one of honour,

one near Christ, one among the saints, but he took up at last a place among God's enemies. If we love evil thoughts, indulge in hidden sin, hold a foul heart under a righteous appearance, we too are losing hold on the good place and drawing near the wretched one.

26. And they gave forth their lots; and the lot fell upon Matthias; and he was numbered with the eleven apostles.

Ought we then to depend ordinarily upon lots as to our conduct or choice? Would it be wise for us to toss up as to the doing or leaving undone anything of moment, as to appointing such or such a person to work in God's Church? No, we never find this plan used again. Since the Holy Spirit came God has given His people sufficient wisdom to discern the right course. This was a special case when Christ the Lord was gone, and His Spirit not yet come, and the eleven dared not absolutely of themselves fill the vacant place. Now the ministry was again complete, and all was ready for the Spirit to come, and apostolic work to begin.

CHAPTER II.

1. The apostles, filled with the Holy Ghost, and speaking divers languages, are admired by some, and derided by others. 14. Whom Peter disproving, and shewing that the apostles spake by the power of the Holy Ghost, that Jesus was risen from the dead, ascended into heaven, had poured down the same Holy Ghost, and was the Messias, a man known to them to be approved of God by his miracles, wonders, and signs, and not crucified without his determinate counsel and foreknowledge: 37. he baptizeth a great number that were converted. 41. Who afterwards devoutly and charitably converse together: the apostles working many miracles, and God daily increasing his church.

AND when the day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place.

The Feast of Pentecost reminded the Jews of God's mercies in harvest, and of the giving of His law from Mount Sinai. To Christians it tells of the harvest of souls which was begun on that day, and of the coming of the Holy Spirit to plant an inward Divine law of love, better than that given from Sinai.

2. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.

Quicken our hearts, O Lord, with Thy Divine power, which was here figured by the mighty wind. Do Thou enter in there, breathe new

life, refresh, cleanse, uplift. We are dull and weary. The world's dust clings to us. May we listen to Thy voice, and not let the world's noises stop our ears.

3. And there appeared unto them cloven tongues like as of fire, and it sat upon each of them.

Kindle us with Thy love, consume what is worthless, make us on fire with devotion. Let us experience the fire of Thy love, so that we may not have to tremble at the fire of Thy wrath. Let the outward visible signs of Thy Divine grace amongst us now be as true a token that Thou art near as were the rushing wind and fiery tongues of old.

4. And they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit gave them utterance.

The Holy Spirit fills hearts that are empty of evil and desirous of God's gifts. That Divine fulness brings with it joy, and power, and hope. It is not confined within, but appears without in earnest words. There is no room for the world or for sin when the Holy Spirit has filled up all the space. He teaches believers when to be silent and when to speak boldly.

5. And there were dwelling at Jerusalem Jews, devout men, out of every nation under heaven.

Many Jews came up to Jerusalem from all parts of the world. Either they came for a time to worship God in His Temple and keep His feasts in His Holy City, or they came to end their days there, waiting for the Christ to come, and desirous that their bodies should rest in the Holy Land. This was their true home, though they had been born and bred elsewhere. Common fellowship in faith linked them together. We have a better Jerusalem, Christ's Holy Catholic Church of which we are members. We need not travel to find it, it is at our doors, and offers all of us a home.

6. Now when this was noised abroad, the multitude came together, and were confounded, because that every man heard them speak in his own language.

God's marvels astonish many, but profit those only who are disposed to seek Him. How often the wonders of nature, or history, or the dispensations of His Providence amaze us! We behold ourselves in presence of what we cannot understand, yet this is not at all the same as faith. Lord, turn our wonder into love; let us believe and adore.

7. And they were all amazed and marvelled, saying one to another, Behold, are not all these which speak Galilæans? 8. And how hear we every man in our own tongue, wherein we were born?

These words were not unintelligible sounds, they expressed thanks and praise to God ; they told of His mercies, but yet in languages which the speakers had never learned. The Jews from distant lands who were sojourning in the Holy City recognised the language of this or that speaker as the familiar tongue of their own land. God wrought this marvel as a sign that He was about to make all nations one in Christ. He overthrew the confusion of tongues which had ensued at Babel, now that He was about to build up the Church.

9. Parthians, and Medes, and Elamites, and the dwellers in Mesopotamia, and in Judæa, and Cappadocia, in Pontus, and Asia, 10. Phrygia, and Pamphylia, in Egypt, and in the parts of Libya about Cyrene, and strangers of Rome, Jews and proselytes, 11. Cretes and Arabians, we do hear them speak in our tongues the wonderful works of God.

These verses remind us how wonderfully the Jews had been dispersed throughout the world. They had been carried captive or been sold for slaves, or gone in search of gain ; anyhow, they had made settlements in so many countries. God's Providence had so ordered it to prepare the way for the Gospel. To every country the Old Testament, and faith in the one true God, and expectation of a Christ to come, had been carried by these Jewish settlers. The apostles had hearers provided for them in every place before they turned to the Gentiles.

12. And they were all amazed, and were in doubt, saying one to another, What meaneth this ?

When God's dealings come before us we ought to ask this question. He bids us open our eyes and seek for His meaning lying hid under the outward marvels. Some people live an aimless, heedless life, and never try to understand anything ; others have their eyes open to discern God's mighty works, and an attentive mind to ponder over them. I have noticed many curious and interesting things in nature, others equally wonderful in the events of history. May God give me grace to understand His power and wisdom disposing them all.

13. Others mocking said, These men are full of new wine.

How easy it is to scoff ! Nothing like ridicule to put down anything we do not quite hold with, only it is a most dangerous habit to turn everything into a joke. Where can God's Spirit find a way in, if we have grown accustomed to despise any one who excels us in reverence, to mock and jest at any earnest word or devout custom ? There are some people who come to church only to amuse themselves, and so carry away nothing else whatever.

14. ¶ But Peter, standing up with the eleven, lifted up his voice, and said unto them, Ye men of Judæa, and all ye that

dwell at Jerusalem, be this known unto you, and hearken to my words :

What a difference between S. Peter in the high priest's hall, trembling at the servant's questions, and at last denying his Master, and the same man standing up boldly and teaching effectually in the face of scoffs and enemies ! Christ had risen again, had sent the Holy Spirit, was sustaining His friends by Divine power, hence the change.

15. For these are not drunken, as ye suppose, seeing it is but the third hour of the day.

The apostles were filled with new power, saw visions, spoke of heavenly truths, wrought miracles ; shall we say all this must be the delusion of an excited brain ? Nay, these same persons gave sound precepts of life, set up an organization to last through the ages ; their words and writings bear every token of sound practical wisdom.

16. But this is that which was spoken by the prophet Joel ;

17. And it shall come to pass in the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh : and your sons and your daughters shall prophesy, and your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams :

No age or condition is excluded from God's gifts of grace. In all nations His Holy Spirit works to sanctify believing hearts. Now that God's own Son has taken human flesh, all mankind is become precious in His sight. Let us bear in mind that all hearts belong to God, and He can illuminate them in what way He thinks fit.

18. And on my servants and on my handmaidens I will pour out in those days of my Spirit ; and they shall prophesy :

God esteemed those who were bond-servants as His own servants. He dignified their servile condition ; they were fit to be taught about salvation, and in their turn teach others ; they too must know of their Saviour. How wonderfully Divine grace reformed the slavery which weighed as a heavy burden on the ancient world, not by any edict, or stir of rebellion, but by the power of the Holy Spirit on master and slave ! Both were now to be enlightened from above.

19. And I will shew wonders in heaven above, and signs in the earth beneath ; blood, and fire, and vapour of smoke : 20. the sun shall be turned into darkness, and the moon into blood, before that great and notable day of the Lord come :

The message to the Jews had a grave and terrible side ; it spoke of the passing away of their Church and nation amidst great distresses. All things in heaven and earth joined to make that

destruction terrible which came about forty years after this time, and yet there is a further fulfilment of it for us in the signs which will go before the last great day.

21. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.

We will not fear though all things give way around us. Those Jews who turned to Christ found salvation amidst all the evils of their day. So it is with us still. Faith sees in the worst that may come the fulfilment of her Saviour's words ; faith beholds Him overruling all events to His wise purposes. Faith and prayer are the two things necessary, they unite us to God so that nothing can drag us away.

22. Ye men of Israel, hear these words ; Jesus of Nazareth, a man approved of God among you by miracles and wonders and signs, which God did by him in the midst of you, as ye yourselves also know :

Glory be to God for the adorable Life of Jesus Christ, that life so full of power and mercy. Mankind have now an example of self-sacrificing love that can renew human weakness. Let us take Christ's life as our model, not in its outward circumstances, but in its abiding spirit of love, of prayer, of zeal to do good. Let us so live that He may approve our life.

23. Him, being delivered by the determinate counsel and foreknowledge of God, ye have taken, and by wicked hands have crucified and slain :

Glory be to God for the adorable Death of Jesus Christ, a death which seemed to the outward eye all shame and pain ; yet God wrought there, prophecies were fulfilled there, evil was overruled to good. Let that death be our remedy against evil, our pledge of pardon. The shameful Cross turns out to be God's Divinely-appointed Sacrifice for the world's sins.

24. Whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death : because it was not possible that he should be holden of it.

Glory be to God for the adorable Resurrection of Jesus Christ. Herein we see our salvation accomplished, and the world beyond the grave laid open to faith. Christ, when He rose, loosed a great chain with which mankind was bound. He Himself broke it, and promised that it shall not hold us long. We are sinners, therefore it will hold us for a while, but yet redeemed and pardoned sinners, so that we trust to share our Master's glory.

25. For David speaketh concerning him, I foresaw the Lord always before my face, for he is on my right hand, that I should not be moved : 26. therefore did my heart rejoice, and

my tongue was glad ; moreover also my flesh shall rest in hope : 27. because thou wilt not leave my soul in hell, neither wilt thou suffer thine Holy One to see corruption. 28. Thou hast made known to me the ways of life ; thou shalt make me full of joy with thy countenance.

The Psalms were well known to Jews, as they are to Christians, from their use in Divine service. In fact there is a threefold use of them —one is by the Church in general, both under the old and new covenants, to express her common prayers and praises. Another is by each believer to express his soul's needs. His feelings are met wonderfully by some word of faith, of repentance, of gratitude, of love, breathed by a Psalmist in old days. There is no part of Scripture so various in its application to our own case. A third use of the Psalter is to behold Christ shadowed forth there. There are thoughts of a Divine Sufferer, of a Righteous King, of One Who should overcome death ; great and Divine words which are beyond the Psalmist's own experience, and look further. Such are these verses ; they speak of a joy, a hope, a victory greater than David himself knew.

29. Men and brethren, let me freely speak unto you of the patriarch David, that he is both dead and buried, and his sepulchre is with us unto this day.

Plainly, David himself is dead and buried long ago. He went the way of all the earth ; nothing but an ancient tomb was left of all his greatness. If this world were all, what a poor thing life would be ! just a momentary flash and then eternal darkness ; but, thank God, faith opens to us a wider vision.

30. Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne ; 31. he seeing this before spake of the resurrection of Christ, that his soul was not left in hell, neither his flesh did see corruption.

In reading the prophetic parts of Scripture we need Divine guidance. It would be a great loss to miss the immediate reference. David's songs tell of his own cares, and triumphs, and hopes. They throw a great light on his own day. But we should bear in mind that God's Spirit, Who spoke by him and designed those songs for the use of believers till the end of the world, so framed the words as to express more than David himself clearly knew. A Divine King and spiritual Conqueror and Liberator from sin and death dwelt dimly in his thoughts, but we see Him now clearly revealed.

32. This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses.

This was the business of the Apostolic Church. This is why Christ risen appeared so frequently, took such pains to show He was alive; this is why He had long before gathered together this little company and trained them with such loving patience for their task. He would have them bear joint witness to the world that He rose from the dead. Join us, Lord, to them by faith and grace, and make us bear witness to our own day of Thy marvels.

33. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear.

Glory be to God for these two other adorable mysteries, the Ascension and the gift of the Holy Spirit. These two (with the three previously mentioned) complete the five great truths—Christ's Life, His Death, His Rising again, His Ascension, His sending the Holy Ghost, on which the Church is built. His Exaltation includes His present reign and future glorious return. His gift of the Holy Spirit implies the life-giving power of the Church's ordinances. Here is the Holy Catholic Faith complete, and planted in the world ready to run its course.

34. For David is not ascended into the heavens: but he saith himself, The LORD said unto my Lord, Sit thou on my right hand, 35. until I make thy foes thy footstool.

This psalm tells of Christ glorified as Priest and King over redeemed humanity. His sitting at the right hand of God expresses the peace, the glory, the power of that kingdom which He administers from His throne in heaven. Let us be His willing and devoted subjects, knowing that He is worthy of our heart's service.

36. Therefore let all the house of Israel know assuredly, that God hath made that same Jesus, whom ye have crucified, both Lord and Christ.

Oh grievous mistake for them to have put to death as a deceiver God's chosen Messenger, the anointed Divine King for Whom all the ages had looked! Lord, give us eyes to discern Thy saints, Thy opportunities, Thy hidden presence, lest we carelessly reject Thee without knowing.

37. ¶ Now when they heard this, they were pricked in their heart, and said unto Peter and to the rest of the apostles, Men and brethren, what shall we do?

God grant that we ourselves may have known this salutary trouble. They felt shame for their sins, grief at their treatment of God's Holy One, fear as to what might follow, and all these subdued them to ask guidance and obey it. Their repentance included both sorrow of heart and earnest desire to amend. S. Peter's

sermon had its effect on the hearts of those who listened. It was no power of eloquence that did this, but his firm faith and God's Spirit working with him.

38. Then Peter said unto them, Repent, and be baptized every one of you in the name of Jesus Christ for the remission of sins, and ye shall receive the gift of the Holy Ghost.

Here we find Christian baptism and the preparation for it first set forth. Intending Christians needed then, as now, "repentance whereby they forsake sin, and faith whereby they stedfastly believe the promises of God made to them in that sacrament." They would receive full forgiveness for the past, full grace and hope for the future. "The Name of Jesus Christ" does not mean here the actual form of words with which disciples were baptized, but rather Christ's religion, Christ's profession, Christ's obedience. They were baptized in faith that Christ had come and that they would be His servants.

39. For the promise is unto you, and to your children, and to all that are afar off, even as many as the Lord our God shall call.

The children have part, and the heathen have part, in the Divine promise. It comes not only for serious and well-instructed persons, but has a message for the simplest and most ignorant. None are outside it. However far off a heart may be, God's voice can reach it. Let us, O Lord, listen to Thy call and obey.

40. And with many other words did he testify and exhort, saying, Save yourselves from this untoward generation.

This was the substance of S. Peter's words; he urged instant decision, instant choice of Christ's side and separation from the world. His prayers, rebukes, persuasions, arguments, all went to this end. It is plain, then, that a Christian profession involves some sacrifice. If we are on God's side, there are some persons, some pursuits, some conversations, we ought to keep away from, nay, give them up plainly and at once.

41. ¶ Then they that gladly received his word were baptized: and the same day there were added unto them about three thousand souls.

Here is S. Peter become a fisher of men, according to Christ's promise. Here we see the Church beginning to be built upon his preaching as a foundation. Here is Divine grace accompanying the apostle's words and subduing hearts to believe. These three thousand are the first harvest gathered into the Church. How many millions since have followed their footsteps and come to believe in and adore the Lord Jesus!

42. And they continued stedfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers.

This is the Holy Church, or company of faithful people, where the apostles' doctrine is still recited in creeds, where bread is still blessed and broken in remembrance of Christ's Passion, where prayers and praises are daily offered in common to God. Join us, Lord, to this Church militant here on earth, that so we may become members at last of the Church triumphant in heaven.

43. And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles.

Thus God wrought at the beginning. He confirmed the apostles' words by these miraculous works. Miracles are not the constant atmosphere of faith, otherwise God's ordinary Providence and our duties would all be upset; and yet from time to time, when occasions offered, He has been pleased to show that He is not bound by His ordinary laws, but can lay them aside at His will. He has supplied us in our day with sufficient evidence from His Holy Word, and from nineteen centuries of Christian experiences, so that we are in less need of miracles.

44. And all that believed were together, and had all things common; 45. and sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need.

These first Christians put aside, as far as they could, the world and its cares. Christ seemed so near, the end of the world so soon to come, heavenly things so great, and this earth so small, that believers in those first days lived for a while apart from earthly occupations. Soon we find among them rich and poor, persons gaining their livelihood by this trade or that, all the common tasks and responsibilities of life. But for a little while they tried to do without all this and live for heaven only; it was the first bright glow of faith, and seemed to put out all other lights.

46. And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart,

These were Jews, and attended on God's temple, and kept His law, as other Jews did; but they knew something which the others knew not of—how God's Son had come to be the Saviour of men. They attended the temple sacrifices, and yet had Holy Communion together besides; they had a hidden spring of joy which was open to themselves only. We too may be like the world around in our life and work, and yet may have the thought of God's love deep within our hearts making us happy.

47. Praising God, and having favour with all the people. And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

Oh bright days too soon over, days of peace, of unity, of joy ! Soon would come persecutions, fightings without and fears within ; soon would come divisions and errors ; but for a little while all was bright. The Christian Church has looked back for centuries to this chapter, and longed to see its history reproduced again among us. Where have such power and love fled to ? Lord, if it be Thy will to grant us some happy hours, let us be grateful, and yet not reckon too surely on their continuing long.

CHAPTER III.

1. Peter preaching to the people that came to see a lame man restored to his feet, 12. professeth the cure not to have been wrought by his or John's own power, or holiness, but by God, and his Son Jesus, and through faith in his name : 13. withal reprehending them for crucifying Jesus. 17. Which because they did it through ignorance, and that thereby were fulfilled God's determinate counsel, and the scriptures : 19. he exhorteth them by repentance and faith to seek remission of their sins, and salvation in the same Jesus.

NOW Peter and John went up together into the temple at the hour of prayer, being the ninth hour.

What drew these two apostles specially together? was it not the memory of their companionship at very solemn times ? They two had gone together to make ready for the Last Supper ; they had together witnessed our Lord's agony, had followed Him to the judgment hall, had run to the sepulchre, had walked with Him risen on the shore of the lake. No wonder that these precious memories filled their hearts and united them in telling of His love. They had so much to relate of Jesus Christ that His Name on their lips did marvels.

2. And a certain man lame from his mother's womb was carried, whom they laid daily at the gate of the temple which is called Beautiful, to ask alms of them that entered into the temple ;

The Beautiful gate has long since crumbled into dust, its marble and its gold are gone, but the memory of the poor cripple who was restored there by Christ's saving Name will last to the end of the world. A good deed of faith and love lasts on long after material splendours have vanished. What makes God's house truly beautiful is the devotion of those who worship there.

3. Who seeing Peter and John about to go into the temple asked an alms.

There are many who would welcome our help. They do not indeed

throng the church gates, but their poor homes would be gladdened by kindness. Our prayers will rise up with more acceptance to God if we are careful to join with them a tender, liberal heart. If poor suppliants do not crowd our path they are yet near us, and their many wants call for our sympathy.

4. And Peter, fastening his eyes upon him with John, said, Look on us.

These saints knew their Master's will, they trusted in His Divine power, they were sure that He, though raised to the throne of heaven, was not less gracious and merciful than of old when He had gone about doing good. Oh that we too could feel that we were messengers from the Fountain of all goodness, having His mercy ready to apply to this world of suffering !

5. And he gave heed unto them, expecting to receive something of them.

If I give heed to those from whom I hope to receive some advancement in means, in position, in learning, much more readily should I look out for those who will help me on my heavenly road. God give me eyes to discern such, and to profit by their counsel.

6. Then Peter said, Silver and gold have I none ; but such as I have give I thee : In the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth rise up and walk.

Speak to my soul, O Lord, as Thy apostles did to this poor cripple. Let Thy holy Name give me strength to rise up and walk along the way of Thy commandments. Too long have I been as one helpless and made no progress in serving God. Thy grace alone, not any powers or means of this world, can give me new life.

7. And he took him by the right hand, and lifted him up : and immediately his feet and ankle bones received strength.

This is Divine power. The effect of medical treatment is gradual, and comes through the use of means. It would have been long, humanly speaking, before the helpless limbs could have regained their strength, but God is not bound to man's methods. This sudden, Divine, unlooked-for gift of strength is but a figure of the inward Divine work of Him Who makes saints out of sinners, upright and pure characters out of the frail and erring.

8. And he leaping up stood, and walked, and entered with them into the temple, walking, and leaping, and praising God.

How he rejoiced in this new power ! He dared not leave his healers lest he should perchance lose it ; but yet he looked up, and rightly, to the true Source of all good gifts. We should ascribe to God the praise for mercies which have come to us through the hands of His servants.

9. *And all the people saw him walking and praising God : 10. and they knew that it was he which sat for alms at the Beautiful gate of the temple : and they were filled with wonder and amazement at that which had happened unto him.*

I desire eyes to discern God's works, and a thankful heart to praise Him for them. Far from me be that apathetic spirit which admires nothing. All round me are poured out treasures of wisdom and goodness both in the world of nature and that of grace. I should be duller than a stone if I did not sometimes admire my Maker's works.

11. *And as the lame man which was healed held Peter and John, all the people ran together unto them in the porch that is called Solomon's, greatly wondering.*

Miracles were meant for this purpose. They were a loud call from God to attend ; they told of a Divine power putting aside for the time ordinary rules and unveiling something new. When men's minds got hardened to the marvels which lie all around us, God added others beyond nature so as to awake their wonder afresh.

12. ¶ *And when Peter saw it, he answered unto the people, Ye men of Israel, why marvel ye at this ? or why look ye so earnestly on us, as though by our own power or holiness we had made this man to walk ?*

Not unto us, O Lord, not unto us, but unto Thy Name be the praise. We are but weak and sinful, and cannot supply any stores of grace out of our own fulness. All we can do is to direct hungry souls to that Infinite Giver of all blessings Who is ready to supply their needs out of His treasure. If the good we could do depended on our own holiness, there would be a poor harvest indeed.

13. *The God of Abraham, and of Isaac, and of Jacob, the God of our fathers, hath glorified his Son Jesus ; whom ye delivered up, and denied him in the presence of Pilate, when he was determined to let him go.*

"O God of Bethel ! by Whose hand
Thy people still are fed,
Who through this weary pilgrimage
Hast all our fathers led,"

we recognise in Christ Jesus the completion of all Thy promises, the revelation of Thy glory and Thy truth. This is He Whom the saints of old dimly discerned and hoped for. Though the Jews did not receive Him, yet we acknowledge Him for the promised Deliverer.

14. *But ye denied the Holy One and the Just, and desired a murderer to be granted unto you;*

Such is human discernment. The All-holy One found no better welcome than a cross. The world has constantly been fascinated by vile wretches who dressed up in a brief show of power or wisdom. Their grand words and showy gifts caught men's applause, while the true Lord of all and His dear saints were reviled.

15. And killed the Prince of life, whom God hath raised from the dead; whereof we are witnesses.

Such is human power. Men think to annihilate the Giver of life. They mock at Him in Whose hands are they and their works; they bury truth out of sight, but in a moment it rises up and confounds them. Their little schemes are swept away by overruling wisdom.

16. And his name through faith in his name hath made this man strong, whom ye see and know: yea, the faith which is by him hath given him this perfect soundness in the presence of you all.

The saving Name is no less mighty, faith no less precious, than in old days. The Book of the Acts discloses to us our Lord doing marvels as great after his Ascension as He had wrought while on earth. He is still near, and holy, and merciful, though out of sight. Faith apprehends Him now just as truly as sight did of old in Galilee, but in a far better manner than sight could do.

17. And now, brethren, I wot that through ignorance ye did it, as did also your rulers.

Apply this thought to many sins which shock you, they are the effect of ignorance, their authors knew not God or their own selves. A dark cloud of ignorance rests on many homes and prevents the children from being taught Christian faith or duty, and so they fall carelessly into all kinds of sin. Let our business be to remove this sad ignorance, and also to beseech God for the pardon of those who have sinned through it.

18. But those things, which God before had shewed by the mouth of all his prophets, that Christ should suffer, he hath so fulfilled.

How can I reconcile man's free agency with God's foretold Providence? Christ's death was the deliberate crime of the Jews, yet it was the outcome of all God's dispositions from eternity. Here I am in presence of a mystery too great for me, but I would fain hold fast both sides of it. I know that I am free to choose good or evil, and yet that the wise purposes of my God will be wrought out whether by me or upon me.

19. ¶ Repent ye therefore, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord;

Even S. Peter could promise forgiveness on no other conditions than those of repentance and conversion. It cannot be gained otherwise. Yet when it comes it is full and free ; it could blot out the sins of those who crucified Christ, and shall we say that any sin is beyond God's mercy ? Let us be content to bear the burden and heat of the day now, and look forward for rest to God's times of refreshing.

20. And he shall send Jesus Christ, which before was preached unto you : 21. whom the heaven must receive until the times of restitution of all things, which God hath spoken by the mouth of all his holy prophets since the world began.

Jesus Christ is then in heaven and not here. God will not send Him forth to be revealed to us till the end of the world. He will not reign here as an earthly king, yet He is with us always by grace according to His promise. Though naturally absent He can yet be spiritually present. He draws our hearts up to heaven where He is by the sweet memories of His earthly sojourn, and this above all in that holy ordinance where believers find Him.

22. For Moses truly said unto the fathers, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me ; him shall ye hear in all things whatsoever he shall say unto you.

The Israelites entreated that God would not speak to them directly from heaven, but would veil His great majesty, and Moses promised them that God would hear their prayers and reveal Himself by one of their brethren, a man amongst men. This came true in Christ Jesus, Who declared God's will to men, and set forth God in earthly life and sufferings. Thus the Divine glory was suited to our human weakness. This was a voice we could listen to, a light we could gaze upon.

23. And it shall come to pass, that every soul, which will not hear that prophet, shall be destroyed from among the people.

Under the Old Testament those who despised God's messengers brought ruin on themselves, and shall we who live now hope to escape if we despise that higher Messenger and wider message which the Gospel brings ? Those who turn away from the revealed goodness of God in Christ Jesus thereby extinguish the sparks of goodness that God has put in their own hearts.

24. Yea, and all the prophets from Samuel and those that follow after, as many as have spoken, have likewise foretold of these days.

There was a tradition concerning the Messiah and His times handed down among the Jews from prophet to prophet ; it grew and strengthened as the ages went on. Prophets test it to their disciples,

and they in turn thought over and declared it. All bore part in one testimony. Just so the Christian Church unites in one testimony concerning Christ now that He has come. The saints and doctors join in declaring His Godhead, His manhood, His atoning death, His sacramental grace, His future return.

25. Ye are the children of the prophets, and of the covenant which God made with our fathers, saying unto Abraham, And in thy seed shall all the kindreds of the earth be blessed.

We who live now are heirs of grace ; the covenant is made with us, the promises are sure, we have to carry forth into all the world the universal blessing of faith. We profit by the love, and prayers, and faithful testimony of those who have gone before. Let us in our day be no less faithful to hold fast and set forth God's truth. How would it ever have come down to us but for the brave acts, and patience, and zeal of believers in past times ?

26. Unto you first God, having raised up his Son Jesus, sent him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from his iniquities.

This is the true blessing, the chief object of the Incarnation. The Old Testament blessing was one chiefly of temporal prosperity ; the New Testament one is chiefly of inward grace. We cannot inherit it unless we are striving against sin. The Divine Saviour leaves no one out. He desires all hearts, no life or character is too insignificant to be the object of His mercy.

CHAPTER IV.

1. The rulers of the Jews offended with Peter's sermon, 4. (though thousands of the people were converted that heard the word,) imprison him and John. 5. After, upon examination Peter boldly avouching the lame man to be healed by the name of Jesus, and that by the same Jesus only we must be eternally saved, 13. they command him and John to preach no more in that name, adding also threatening, 23. whereupon the church fleeth to prayer. 31. And God, by moving the place where they were assembled, testified that he heard their prayer : confirming the church with the gift of the Holy Ghost, and with mutual love and charity.

AND as they spake unto the people, the priests, and the captain of the temple, and the Sadducees, came upon them, 2. being grieved that they taught the people, and preached through Jesus the resurrection from the dead.

Christ's saints began soon to share in the same cup of persecution

which their Master had tasted. The bright hopes and high successes of those first days did not last long without crosses coming in. Where God's Word is truly preached it is sure to encounter contradiction from some one ; it would not be God's Word otherwise. It never has been, and never will be, acceptable to all men, but only to such as desire to turn to God.

3. And they laid hands on them, and put them in hold unto the next day : for it was now eventide.

Christians have had leisure for many prison thoughts since then, but this night was the first of all such occasions. How human fear and God's grace must have striven in their hearts ! How they must have leant on faith in their Master's Divine power ! Consider how all through the ages God's strength has been made perfect in the weakness of His servants, while they have been alone, bound, and helpless. Though the great world turned against them now, yet they found a Friend.

4. Howbeit many of them which heard the word believed ; and the number of the men was about five thousand.

What secret shall we hit on in these unbelieving days to convert men to Christ ? Faith grows cold, and the number of unbelievers multiplies ; nay, some men have a frightful zeal for unbelief, they are more zealous to uproot faith than we are to plant it. Lord, help us who cannot help ourselves. We long to see Thy Divine power manifested in the conversion of souls. Faith comes abundantly of Thy gift.

5. ¶ And it came to pass on the morrow, that their rulers, and elders, and scribes, 6. and Annas the high priest, and Caiaphas, and John, and Alexander, and as many as were of the kindred of the high priest, were gathered together at Jerusalem.

When the apostles were brought before this great assemblage, which included all the most eminent persons of their nation, they were not frightened out of their duty. Conversation with the Lord Jesus, intercourse with God in prayer, had taught them the measure of human greatness ; they looked up to One Who was their true High Priest and King, though unseen.

7. And when they had set them in the midst, they asked, By what power, or by what name, have ye done this ?

O saving Power and glorious Name, let our days too know Thy excellence. We long for this evidence of religion, the sight of wonders of grace wrought by preaching Christ. No name but His can work wonders, no power but His can give new life.

8. Then Peter, filled with the Holy Ghost, said unto them, Ye rulers of the people, and elders of Israel,

Once Peter had trusted in his own strength, and then he met with a great downfall ; now he has a better support. He is able to repeat that confession about his Master which he made of old, and which won him so great a blessing, and able to avoid now the snare of human respect which led him into the threefold denial. Though we may have been unfaithful before, yet let us rise when He calls and do our best. He is with us.

9. If we this day be examined of the good deed done to the impotent man, by what means he is made whole; 10. be it known unto you all, and to all the people of Israel, that by the name of Jesus Christ of Nazareth, whom ye crucified, whom God raised from the dead, even by him doth this man stand here before you whole.

This is what the Gospel has wrought, good deeds. In its train comes mercy for soul and body ; it is the spring of true love. The Cross and Resurrection of our dear Saviour is the fountain whence all this healing spring has flowed.

11. This is the stone which was set at nought of you builders, which is become the head of the corner.

Lord, give us courage to tell our brethren of their faults and needs. How can they be at rest while they lack the true Foundation ? Shall we hold our tongues and let them dream on without their Saviour ? At least we should make an effort to declare the preciousness of Christ's salvation, and the misery of life apart from Him. S. Peter was not afraid to blame sharply where need was.

12. Neither is there salvation in any other : for there is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved.

We desire salvation for body and soul. We live here on earth amidst many dangers and sorrows, with death full in our view ; what should we do unless God had revealed Himself to us in Christ Jesus ? His life gives us a pattern, His death forgiveness, His rising again a hope of immortality. We are not obliged to judge those who never had an opportunity of knowing Him. God deals with them according to the light they had ; but for us Jesus Christ is all, and we have no hope apart from Him.

13. ¶ Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were unlearned and ignorant men, they marvelled ; and they took knowledge of them, that they had been with Jesus.

May it be so with us, may men observe in our ways some tokens of having frequented Christ's society. A few moments spent with Him apart from the world have a powerful influence on life and behaviour.

Let us be with Him at His Holy Table, and in prayer, and in all ways we can. Thus our humble, common hearts will be transfigured after the likeness of our heavenly Friend.

14. And beholding the man which was healed standing with them, they could say nothing against it.

But we do not see such miracles worked nowadays ; no, God did not wish us to live in a constant atmosphere of miracle. He desired His world to go on by ordinary laws for the most part, yet the saving Name of Jesus has healed inward disorders, ministered to inward trials ; it has a healing virtue which no human art can supply.

15. But when they had commanded them to go aside out of the council, they conferred among themselves, 16. saying, What shall we do to these men ? for that indeed a notable miracle hath been done by them is manifest to all them that dwell in Jerusalem ; and we cannot deny it.

Not even a manifest miracle could affect them. If we had lived under the terrors of Sinai, or in sight of Christ's marvellous works, we might have been just as little touched. It needs an inward voice, an unseen touch of grace to make the outward wonder fruitful in producing faith.

17. But that it spread no further among the people, let us straitly threaten them, that they speak henceforth to no man in this name.

Christ's enemies thought His religion a kind of infectious disease ; they did not wish it to spread or more people to catch it ; they thought it an infirmity of the soul at best. We, on the contrary, are proud of it, and long to see it ruling in more hearts and lives. How much better off the world would be if true Christians were more numerous than they are !

18. And they called them, and commanded them not to speak at all nor teach in the name of Jesus.

This is what the devil wants, silence. Let him have his way and the saving Name of Jesus will be hidden. There is so much in man's nature which answers to the preaching of the Gospel that the devil and his ministers are always desirous to put down faithful preaching ; they know God's side must win, if any hearing at all is allowed Him.

19. But Peter and John answered and said unto them, Whether it be right in the sight of God to hearken unto you more than unto God, judge ye.

Here is a grave dilemma, when man commands one thing and God

another. Lord, strengthen us in the day of trial to take Thy side and obey Thy word, sure that that will come out right at last. Often it seems easiest to hearken to man's bidding, but yet God's warnings are much more terrible, His promises infinitely sweeter than aught which man can offer.

20. For we cannot but speak the things which we have seen and heard.

This is the foundation of effective preaching. We have followed Christ the Lord; we know His teaching, His life and death; we have seen the power of His risen life; we have beheld His Name bring healing to souls. All this is part of our own experience, nothing can take away this treasure from us.

21. So when they had further threatened them, they let them go, finding nothing how they might punish them, because of the people: for all men glorified God for that which was done.
22. For the man was above forty years old, on whom this miracle of healing was shewed.

Are there not now many of high position and great learning who treat the Gospel with open contempt? it is to them an empty name, an exploded superstition. Yet there are many who guide their lives by its light, trace in their souls its healing virtue, know it has never failed them. We do not care for the threats or scoffs of this world's princes, if we have within us sure evidence of the power of Jesus Christ.

23. ¶ And being let go, they went to their own company, and reported all that the chief priests and elders had said unto them.

These all had common joys, common anxieties. The progress of Christ's Gospel was their first thought; they felt for the dangers, rejoiced in the deliverance of their brethren; they encouraged one another to obey God rather than men. How great help we receive from a word of encouragement and sympathy! it is God Who speaks, though by men's lips.

24. And when they heard that, they lifted up their voice to God with one accord, and said, Lord, thou art God, which hast made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all that in them is:

Faith rests on God's Almightyness. His Divine power that made the world out of nothing is able to govern it and bring order afresh out of its many confusions. There is great support in knowing that our God is Almighty, the Maker of heaven and earth. What can hurt His servants? Who can overthrow His wise Providence?

25. Who by the mouth of thy servant David hast said, Why

did the heathen rage, and the people imagine vain things ? 26. The kings of the earth stood up, and the rulers were gathered together against the Lord, and against his Christ.

The Psalter was the Prayer Book of the Church in those days, and it still forms the greater part of our Prayer Book now. God's worshippers in every age have been sustained by its lofty words, comforted by its prayers, found their own penitence, or hope, or thankfulness echoed in it. This is one point of unity between the Jewish and the Christian Church, and between members of the Christian Church in every time and country. We too should delight to sing or say the Psalms. When we are lying on the bed of death they will still supply us with words for our last prayers.

27. For of a truth against thy holy child Jesus, whom thou hast anointed, both Herod, and Pontius Pilate, with the Gentiles, and the people of Israel, were gathered together,

What a mighty array ! Who can be surprised at opposition or misunderstanding when the Most Holy One had all the world against Him ? If we share in that anointing of the Holy Spirit which Jesus our Lord had in all its fulness and afterwards bestowed on us, we may expect to find ourselves on the unpopular side. Lord, Thy servants have always found it so, and yet they persevered.

28. For to do whatsoever thy hand and thy counsel determined before to be done.

Look what all the might of man ends in ; it has to carry out the designs of God. He makes the independence, nay, the rebellion of His creatures all serve to the working out of His overruling Providence. This is shown in the worst of all crimes being overruled to the greatest of all mercies, but it holds true in a mysterious manner of all man's wickedness and its results. I apprehend here a mystery too great for me, how the creature has freedom, and yet the Creator guides all.

29. And now, Lord, behold their threatenings : and grant unto thy servants, that with all boldness they may speak thy word,

These oppressed Christians did not pray for anything else but courage; they feared nothing except that they themselves might be silenced. What they desired was power to speak in their Master's Name ; if they could but tell of Him all was well. I wish that my prayers were of this kind. I am so much of a coward that I do not even ask for courage to declare my faith.

30. By stretching forth thine hand to heal ; and that signs and wonders may be done by the name of thy holy child Jesus.

They sought for a proof that men would attend to. We ask God now

not to give us outward signs, but to show His work in a still better way, by healing sin and sorrow, and performing wonders of grace. All our prayers should end thus, "through Jesus Christ." It is His mercy, His love, His power that alone can do any good. Our great frailty is manifest enough. We do not expect our name can do any good; it is the Name of Jesus in which we trust.

31. ¶ And when they had prayed, the place was shaken where they were assembled together; and they were all filled with the Holy Ghost, and they spake the word of God with boldness.

Our prayers are so cold and scanty that they get little answer. Lord, help us to pray as these first Christians did, reverently, earnestly, and faithfully, that so our prayers may be acceptable to Thee. We should pray for particular blessings, for particular persons, against our special dangers, for those graces we most need. Prayer is a grave matter; if we use it well God will greatly help us thereby.

32. And the multitude of them that believed were of one heart and of one soul: neither said any of them that ought of the things which he possessed was his own; but they had all things common.

This was the fulfilment of our Lord's prayer for His disciples, that they might all be one. This it was which gave them strength to resist their enemies. We too should find peace and strength in such a spirit. How much greater would the sum of happiness be if all those who possessed comforts, advantages, and means sought to share them wisely among their less favoured brethren!

33. And with great power gave the apostles witness of the resurrection of the Lord Jesus: and great grace was upon them all.

This was the apostles' special duty, to be witnesses of their Master's Resurrection. We have some of their testimony recorded at the end of each of the four Evangelists, and in the beginning of 1 Cor. xv. The whole edifice of Christian faith rests on the testimony of our Lord's companions. He chose and prepared them to give this testimony, and they still give it. They knew Christ our Lord so well that they could not be mistaken when He appeared among them after He had gone through death.

34. Neither was there any among them that lacked: for as many as were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the prices of the things that were sold, 35. and laid them down at the apostles' feet: and distribution was made unto every man according as he had need.

Rich people who became Christians in those days could not bear to

enjoy their lands or houses by themselves. They wished their poorer brethren to enjoy the proceeds of their wealth. Oh for the spirit which is impatient of our comforts and advantages and longs earnestly to impart them! I know how many have need of those very blessings which are so lavishly showered on me. God grant me a self-denying heart and liberal hand.

36. And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus,

Barnabas was a son of consolation. He was able to encourage and cheer his brethren. He was liberal and tender-hearted, always ready to make allowances and bring hearts together. Lord, raise up for us many such. In this weary world we faint, and lag behind, and get scattered. How blessed it is to meet some one who by word and example revives our courage and helps us to bear and to fight!

37. Having land, sold it, and brought the money, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

He became an apostle himself afterwards, and was joined with S. Paul in the beginning of his great missionary work. He gave himself and all he had to God with a perfect heart, and so was thought worthy to join the apostolic company who had left all and followed Christ. Those who would be God's ministers must keep back nothing. God desires all that they have to be given up to His service. He does not always require it in the same way, but when He asks they must be ready to resign their dearest treasure into His merciful hands.

CHAPTER V.

1. After that Ananias and Sapphira his wife for their hypocrisy at Peter's rebuke had fallen down dead, 12. and that the rest of the apostles had wrought many miracles, 14. to the increase of the faith: 17. the apostles are again imprisoned, 19. but delivered by an angel bidding them to preach openly to all: 21. when, after their teaching accordingly in the temple, 29. and before the council, 33. they are in danger to be killed, through the advice of Gamaliel, a great counsellor among the Jews, they be kept alive, 40. and are but beaten: for which they glorify God, and cease no day from preaching.

BUT a certain man named Ananias, with Sapphira his wife, sold a possession, 2. and kept back part of the price, his wife also being privy to it, and brought a certain part, and laid it at the apostles' feet.

Alas ! here are believers who serve two masters. They desired to stand well as examples of devoted charity, and also to provide for themselves secretly. They mixed with the throng of those who pressed forward to give up their all, yet their hearts were not there. Lord, keep me from the sin of professing to give up myself wholly to Thee, and yet reserving a hidden treasure, fast locked up, which I cannot bring myself to surrender. Take tongue, and thoughts, and body, and time, and let it all be Thine henceforward.

3. But Peter said, Ananias, why hath Satan filled thine heart to lie to the Holy Ghost, and to keep back part of the price of the land ?

The first sacrifice God requires of us is sincerity. We may not be able to bring perfect consistency, deep love, fervent faith—these are above us as yet—but let us at least be honest in our religion. We cannot cheat God. Let our words of Him and to Him be plain truth. Let our prayers be a just reflection of ourselves, as we indeed are.

4. Whiles it remained, was it not thine own ? and after it was sold, was it not in thine own power ? why hast thou conceived this thing in thine heart ? thou hast not lied unto men, but unto God.

How sin finds a way into religious actions, among religious men, in a time of great fervour ! It is plain that we cannot be secure in our day. Help us, O Lord, to keep a watch on the thoughts we conceive and the words we utter, lest something amiss creeps in. Cleanse us from our secret faults, and make us entirely straightforward in time to come.

5. And Ananias hearing these words fell down, and gave up the ghost : and great fear came on all them that heard these things. 6. And the young men arose, wound him up, and carried him out, and buried him.

O grave lesson ! God is near, lying and irreverence offend His awful Presence. His justice is not to be blinded by our professions of service. Of the eternal state of Ananias we are told nothing. It may be that God had mercy on him, and sent this sudden and awful death as a temporal chastisement to save his soul. At least we learn to beware for ourselves. It is clear that hypocritical devotion is hateful to God though it may win temporary praise from men.

7. And it was about the space of three hours after, when his wife, not knowing what was done, came in. 8. And Peter answered unto her, Tell me whether ye sold the land for so much ? And she said, Yea, for so much.

Let the thought of God's Presence ever be with us. He knows our most secret thoughts. If we kept this in mind we should avoid

false professions or exaggerations. This lie which Sapphira and her husband agreed to tell was the fruit of their unbelief; they forgot that God dwelt in His Church, and thought only how they could themselves obtain most cheaply credit for true devotion.

9. Then Peter said unto her, How is it that ye have agreed together to tempt the Spirit of the Lord? behold, the feet of them which have buried thy husband are at the door, and shall carry thee out.

Lord, keep us from leading one another into evil, and from tempting Thy Holy Spirit. Sudden death of the body may not come upon such sin now, but there comes instead a hardening of the heart. Let us not make the awful experience of tempting God's Spirit. He is surely near. He dwells in the Church, in the Sacraments, in the soul and bodies of believers. If we deliberately despise Him, our time for repentance may never come.

10. Then fell she down straightway at his feet, and yielded up the ghost: and the young men came in, and found her dead, and, carrying her forth, buried her by her husband.

If St. Peter's words went to the woman's heart and pierced her through with shame and fear so that she fell down dead, what will not sinners feel in the awful Judgment Day when God's voice will declare our sins and fix our eternal state? In that dread hour, Lord, have mercy on me. I confess my sins and accept willingly the doom of suffering and death which Thou hast appointed for me; it is in mercy, not in judgment.

11. And great fear came upon all the church, and upon as many as heard these things.

The lesson of this story is, "Be not deceived. God is not mocked." The Church of Christ is a reality, not a mere decent profession. God is there, full of power as of mercy. We too should behave in church, or at Communion, or in the hour of temptation, with great fear. Our Lord is indeed full of love, but awful to those who despise Him.

12. ¶ And by the hands of the apostles were many signs and wonders wrought among the people; (and they were all with one accord in Solomon's porch. 13. And of the rest durst no man join himself to them: but the people magnified them.

The apostles were honoured with such powers because they were our Saviour's own chosen witnesses. Our faith rests on what they had to tell of Christ the Lord. He had chosen them with much prayer, had trained them with love and patience, had let them behold His agony and His glory. As they spoke of Him God confirmed their words by marvels above the course of nature.

14. *And believers were the more added to the Lord, multitudes both of men and women.)*

Growth is a sign of life. Unless the Gospel is gaining it loses. In such matters there is no such thing as standing still. Our Christian bodies nowadays are too much taken up with themselves. They forget to go out into the world and gather in fresh converts. They leave the ignorant and sinful alone. Lord, give us courage to add new souls to the number of Thy servants; let us at least never subtract any by evil examples. The number of Thy friends is too scanty, let it be enlarged in our day.

15. *Insomuch that they brought forth the sick into the streets, and laid them on beds and couches, that at the least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them.*

This is the continuation of Christ's own work of healing, He too had gone about healing everywhere. Disease and pain are the masters of this troubled world, but God's messengers have come to tell us of an eternal home where no evil can enter, and they brought with them to confirm their words some gifts of health and life. What if these healing mercies were soon exhausted? We look for their renewal in heaven.

16. *There came also a multitude out of the cities round about unto Jerusalem, bringing sick folks, and them which were vexed with unclean spirits: and they were healed every one.*

Those are happy whom the sense of their troubles brings to the Holy Jerusalem, God's Church. Sickness and sorrow, and the approach of death are meant to lead us hither. Here is life and peace. God does not now give them all at once, He prefers to heal us gradually. Vexing fears and sad thoughts brood over us for a while, but yet we have a spell to charm them away.

17. ¶ *Then the high priest rose up, and all they that were with him, (which is the sect of the Sadducees,) and were filled with indignation, 18. and laid their hands on the apostles, and put them in the common prison.*

What, the Sadducees hated the Gospel so much! Were they not easy-going people? Was not their plan to laugh at heavenly mysteries, and clutch for themselves all the best places and largest incomes? Yes, but such a temper easily becomes persecuting. When worldly unbelieving men meet with examples of prayer, and faith, and reverence, they very easily turn from jests to reviling and ill-usage. True religion is not much more acceptable to Sadducees in these days than it was then.

19. *But the angel of the Lord by night opened the prison doors, and brought them forth, and said,*

With what different feelings prisoners have entered their prison ! Some have entered those dreary walls with sad sinkings of heart, some with sullen bitterness or despair, some with humble penitence, and some with noble resolutions and heavenly patience. Think over prison life. What sad and hopeless tears, and yet what hopeful and blessed tears have fallen in such places !

20. Go, stand and speak in the temple to the people all the words of this life.

We must be set free if we would speak of freedom, living ourselves if we would tell of life. Faith in Christ is life. It rests upon Christ's new life out of the grave ; it makes us live truly here and perfectly hereafter. Will any one believe us when we speak of it, unless they see its proofs in us ? We ought to be able to tell our own experience of what God has wrought.

21. And when they heard that, they entered into the temple early in the morning, and taught. But the high priest came, and they that were with him, and called the council together, and all the senate of the children of Israel, and sent to the prison to have them brought.

God allowed this great assemblage to be gathered on purpose to bring His Gospel more plainly before the rulers of Israel. He would have all the chosen people hear His message. The high priest on his side thought only how most effectually to put a stop to Christian preaching. Thus God's Providence and man's designs go different ways to the same end. It is God Who calls, Who orders, Who disposes, though men make a stir for a while.

22. But when the officers came, and found them not in the prison, they returned, and told, 23. saying, The prison truly found we shut with all safety, and the keepers standing without before the doors : but when we had opened, we found no man within.

The apostles had passed through locked doors and amongst watchful guards. They had come as Jesus our Lord Himself had sometimes come, in ways beyond human skill to trace. More than mortal power had watched over them. So, Lord, I believe Thou never faillest Thy servants. Whether Thou deliverest them by an angel, or by earthly means, or by a merciful end, still they are safe under Thy care.

24. Now when the high priest and the captain of the temple and the chief priests heard these things, they doubted of them whereunto this would grow.

This strange deliverance worked many perplexities in the minds of the Jews. They could not explain it away, yet we do not read

that it converted them. God might work miracles all round us, and yet our hearts not be touched. Saving faith is a Divine gift, and is commonly bestowed on honest dispositions that seek God sincerely, or at least on the contrite and repentant. Do not think that hearing of or even seeing a miracle would of necessity turn you to God.

25. Then came one and told them, saying, Behold, the men whom ye put in prison are standing in the temple, and teaching the people. 26. Then went the captain with the officers, and brought them without violence: for they feared the people, lest they should have been stoned.

The apostles had begun again to teach the people about the Lord Jesus in spite of the strict prohibition they had received, and their recent imprisonment for it. What power that holy Name must have had over them! How full they must have been of the subject of Christ's work! They could not help telling of it, whatever might come. I wish that the contrary was not my case. I am commanded and bound to speak of Christ. I am quite free to do so, and yet my cold, dull lips are silent, or utter mere forms with no earnestness.

27. And when they had brought them, they set them before the council: and the high priest asked them, 28. saying, Did not we straitly command you that ye should not teach in this name? and, behold, ye have filled Jerusalem with your doctrine, and intend to bring this man's blood upon us.

The Gospel had grown so far from small beginnings. It had filled the Holy City, and produced shame and grief in many minds concerning our Lord's death. His enemies feared lest they should be visited with vengeance for it. They abhorred the mention of His Blood. We also feel how great a crime it was to crucify the Lord of Glory, but we adore the merciful result of that day in bringing salvation to the world. Christ's precious Blood has a far greater power to save than to avenge.

29. ¶ Then Peter and the other apostles answered and said, We ought to obey God rather than men.

Men said, "Be silent." God said, "Speak." S. Peter knew which to obey. God plant in our hearts this brave maxim. May we carry it out in our lives. When men threaten us, or persuade us, into wrongdoing, may this verse come into our remembrance and strengthen us to disobey them. It is right to disobey men if we are fulfilling our Divine Master's orders.

30. The God of our fathers raised up Jesus, whom ye slew and hanged on a tree.

Here we may observe what the faith of apostolic Christians was. They believed in one God Who made heaven and earth, and Who was revealed in the Old Testament Scriptures ; and they believed in His Son Jesus Who was raised up to be men's Saviour, and suffered death on the shameful Cross. Keep us in this true faith even in these doubting days, Lord, we beseech Thee.

31. Him hath God exalted with his right hand to be a Prince and a Saviour, for to give repentance to Israel, and forgiveness of sins.

They believed, further, that this same Jesus was raised from the dead and exalted to reign in heaven, that He is still our mighty Lord and Divine Helper, that through Him is forgiveness of sins. We too believe this, and so we worship Jesus Christ. He is our adorable Saviour, not merely a wise man who lived once. We approach Him daily and ask for His gifts.

32. And we are his witnesses of these things ; and so is also the Holy Ghost, whom God hath given to them that obey him.

Further, they recognised a Holy Catholic Church appointed to be the witness and keeper of truth. They believed in the Holy Ghost Who gives life and renews hearts. Here is the Apostles' Creed which was afterwards written down and used by believers in their worship. It is merely the summary of that faith which Christ's apostles professed and taught, as we have read in these verses. We inherit this faith and mean to hold it fast by God's mercy.

33. ¶ When they heard that, they were cut to the heart, and took counsel to slay them.

God's Word now has its enemies as it had then. While it is a delight to those who receive it, it is abhorred and despised by many. Strange that modest words, and glorious promises related, and duty bravely done should only produce a feeling of hatred. Yet it is so, and we must not be surprised to meet men nowadays who delight to heap reviling on Jesus Christ and on His servants.

34. Then stood there up one in the council, a Pharisee, named Gamaliel, a doctor of the law, had in reputation among all the people, and commanded to put the apostles forth a little space ;

Gamaliel was a very learned man, and much reverenced by the Jews. He spoke on this occasion very fairly, very wisely, bidding the council not be too hasty. He pleaded for reason and moderation. God has work for such men to do, but He desires us to go further than Gamaliel did. We should make up our minds. We should boldly take the right side. Gamaliel would not come to Christ himself, though he was of service to Christ's friends on this occasion.

35. And said unto them, Ye men of Israel, take heed to yourselves what ye intend to do as touching these men.

Let me take heed ; let no injustice, or unkindness, or evil thoughts come in to make me do harm to my brethren. I belong to God's new Israel. I have been taught His truth. I look forward to His kingdom. Let all these thoughts turn me back from oppressing any. How easily I may break the law of kindness !

36. For before these days rose up Therudas, boasting himself to be somebody ; to whom a number of men, about four hundred, joined themselves : who was slain ; and all, as many as obeyed him, were scattered, and brought to nought.

Theudas professed himself to be the Christ, and gathered followers together, but when he died all his work came to nothing. The Lord Jesus after His death gathered together a great company of believers from all nations, who have never been dispersed. It was His Resurrection and the Holy Spirit's Presence that made all the difference. His death is life to His friends to remember, while the death of their master was confusion to the false prophet's friends.

37. After this man rose up Judas of Galilee in the days of the taxing, and drew away much people after him : he also perished ; and all, even as many as obeyed him, were dispersed.

Those teachers began by rebellion ; they tried to mend matters by upsetting the government of the country. Jesus our Lord and His friends wrought from within. They made war against that evil world and all its oppressions, but not with earthly weapons. They planted faith, and prayer, and hope in the heart, and thus improved the world and abolished many evils. Teach us, O Lord, to go about reforms in this wise and practical manner.

38. And now I say unto you, Refrain from these men, and let them alone : for if this counsel or this work be of men, it will come to nought : 39. but if it be of God, ye cannot overthrow it ; lest haply ye be found even to fight against God.

Save us, O Lord, from being fighters against Thee. Our little wisdom and strength would have a poor chance against Omnipotence. Let us try to overthrow what is plainly evil, and stand up for what is plainly good. Then God will lead us on, and show us which is His side and how to work for Him. If it is not all clear yet, still He will at last make all things plain to those who seek in sincerity.

40. And to him they agreed : and when they had called the apostles, and beaten them, they commanded that they should not speak in the name of Jesus, and let them go.

How strange that God's saints should be allowed to suffer all this insult and pain, and be silenced by strict commands from the heads of His chosen people! I cannot help suspecting that in the Church nowadays things are often wrong side uppermost, God's chosen friends and instruments oppressed and put to shame, and His enemies in high places. If this was so in Jerusalem, it may be so in our own day.

41. ¶ And they departed from the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer shame for his name. 42. And daily in the temple, and in every house, they ceased not to teach and preach Jesus Christ.

When shall we attain to this height? Here are persons who rejoice to suffer pain and shame for Christ's sake; not only they bear it patiently, but thank God for it. I fear I have got many steps to climb before I can get to feel thus. I must accustom myself to take affronts cheerfully, to be patient and humble. I must practise giving up my own way, and then perhaps in time God will raise me up to such a Divine spirit of courageous love. Nothing could stop the apostles from preaching about Christ. He was more dear than ever to them, now they were sharing in His sufferings.

CHAPTER VI.

i. The apostles, desirous to have the poor regarded for their bodily sustenance, as also careful themselves to dispense the word of God, the food of the soul, 3. appoint the office of deaconship to seven chosen men. 5. Of whom Stephen, a man full of faith, and of the Holy Ghost, is one. 12. Who is taken of those, whom he confounded in disputing, 13. and after falsely accused of blasphemy against the law and the temple.

AND in those days, when the number of the disciples was multiplied, there arose a murmuring of the Grecians against the Hebrews, because their widows were neglected in the daily ministration.

The Grecian Jews who had become Christians complained that their poor folk were passed over and unfairly treated in comparison with the Hebrew Jews. Even in the Apostolic Church such grievances and jealousies appeared, and indeed it is hard to minister to the poor without causing something of the kind. Let us be forbearing with the poor, do our best to help them, remember how their narrow circumstances weigh them down. If we were so hard put to it we should murmur more than they do.

2. Then the twelve called the multitude of the disciples unto them, and said, It is not reason that we should leave the word of God, and serve tables.

Here are two kinds of duty, one to preach God's Word, and the other to dispense charity to His poor. Both needed to be done, but the apostles found it impossible for them to continue doing both. So they chose for their own that which God had specially laid upon them, the preaching His Word, and resolved to trust fit hands with the other. Christian ministers are sometimes in danger of sinking their spiritual work in the multitude of business that weighs on them. They leave the Word of God and the souls of men, and content themselves with getting through their business. The apostles thought that a mistake.

3. Wherefore, brethren, look ye out among you seven men of honest report, full of the Holy Ghost and wisdom, whom we may appoint over this business.

Even this was so well worth doing carefully that they chose good men for it. It requires uprightness, and wisdom, and the aid of God's Holy Spirit to bestow alms rightly. It is the Lord's business, and He took care about it Himself while He was on earth. Remember that if God puts it in your power to provide help, or relief for the needy, it is a task worth doing well, and which He will require an account of.

4. But we will give ourselves continually to prayer, and to the ministry of the word.

Here is pastoral life summed up in two words. It should be taken up above all with prayer and with ministering God's Word. Pastors should speak for the people to God, and for God to the people. They should go up to Him in ordinances of grace, and down again to the people to teach and guide them towards heaven. If clergy thought more of these two great matters than they do the Church would get on better.

5. ¶ And the saying pleased the whole multitude: and they chose Stephen, a man full of faith and of the Holy Ghost, and Philip, and Prochorus, and Nicanor, and Timon, and Parmenas, and Nicolas a proselyte of Antioch:

These seven represent to us the lower order of the ministry, as the apostles do the orders of bishops and priests. They were chosen at first to care for the poor and attend to money matters, yet they seem to have added to these duties much of preaching also. Their influence was used to help on the Lord's cause in all ways. In caring for the needs of the poor they found opportunity to speak of their Divine Master.

6. Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid their hands on them.

Here is the first ordination by the apostles. They began henceforward to delegate part of their powers and duties to fit persons, so as to hand on the sacred ministry in Christ's Church. The old Levitical priesthood came to men by their birth into a certain family, but the Christian ministry, which is a far better one, by a free choice accompanied with prayers and laying on of hands. We can thank our Lord for His goodness in providing thus that His witnesses should always continue in the world till His Second Coming.

7. And the word of God increased; and the number of the disciples multiplied in Jerusalem greatly; and a great company of the priests were obedient to the faith.

This is probably the highest point of prosperity reached by the Christian Church in Jerusalem. So far God's designs for the conversion of Israel to Christ seemed to have gone on prosperously. Christians no doubt thought that all pointed to such a Divine fulfilment of the prophecies. Even those who had crucified Christ Jesus now loved and served Him. But, alas! God's hidden plans were far otherwise. We shall soon see how the Jews turned against the Gospel, and yet their very rejection of it brought about great results for the world.

8. And Stephen, full of faith and power, did great wonders and miracles among the people.

Stephen was chosen only for a humble ministry, but he performed that so well that God gave him power to do greater things. His life was short and his death sudden, but he did far more than many that live long lives. May we not say, sooner wear out than rust out? It is better to do heartily what we can for God in a few years than to pass many years of idle self-pleasing.

9. ¶ Then there arose certain of the synagogue, which is called the synagogue of the Libertines, and Cyrenians, and Alexandrians, and of them of Cilicia and of Asia, disputing with Stephen. 10. And they were not able to resist the wisdom and the spirit by which he spake.

Out of such disputes God's truth comes the clearer. Do not be frightened when heresies and errors come, and sharp controversy arises. God's way is so. He brings out great and important truths thus. Stephen had some lessons to teach believers which no one else had uttered before him, and which were of the greatest moment. S. Paul, who afterwards took up Stephen's words and carried them into all the world, was no doubt one of these very Cilicians who at this time abhorred every word Stephen said.

11. *Then they suborned men, which said, We have heard him speak blasphemous words against Moses, and against God.*

He had never really spoken irreverently about Moses or about God. No doubt he had told them that Moses was but God's servant, and that a higher Prophet had come now. No doubt he had said that God had other revelations than that which he had imparted through Moses. All this they twisted into a charge of blasphemy. Stephen feared this, yet had done nothing to cause it except speak the truth.

12. *And they stirred up the people, and the elders, and the scribes, and came upon him, and caught him, and brought him to the council, 13. and set up false witnesses, which said, This man ceaseth not to speak blasphemous words against this holy place, and the law :*

Had he spoken against God's temple or His law? No, it was false to say so. He entirely disapproved of any irreverence in the temple, and no doubt he himself obeyed the law. The spirit of his words was quite different from what these witnesses made out, and yet he may have said that God could be worshipped acceptably in any place, and that the ancient law was meant to lead on to the Gospel. Stephen's message was that the temple and the law were but steps in the great progress of God's designs.

14. *For we have heard him say, that this Jesus of Nazareth shall destroy this place, and shall change the customs which Moses delivered us.*

Our Lord's holy words of warning, His prophecies of the destruction of Jerusalem and of the temple, were not yet written down, but believers repeated them one to another. They knew that their Master had spoken with grief and severity of the judgments to come on the Holy City. How could they help remembering what He had said? They believed that the Crucified One would return in awful majesty, and that His enemies would be confounded. His Divine power would remain for ever when the holy place and Jewish rites should be gone.

15. *And all that sat in the council, looking stedfastly on him, saw his face as it had been the face of an angel.*

This may have been a glory like Moses had when he came down from the mount, or at least so bright and beautiful a look that his enemies were amazed into silence. May God so cleanse us within that our very faces may tell of peace, and love, and truth! The human countenance tells a tale of the heart within.

CHAPTER VII.

. Stephen, permitted to answer to the accusation of blasphemy, 2. sheweth that Abraham worshipped God rightly, and how God chose the fathers 20. before Moses was born, and before the tabernacle and temple were built: 37. that Moses himself witnessed of Christ: 44. and that all outward ceremonies were ordained according to the heavenly pattern, to last but for a time: 51. reprehending their rebellion, and murdering of Christ, the Just One, whom the prophets foretold should come into the world. 54. Whereupon they stoned him to death, who commendeth his soul to Jesus, and humbly prayeth for them.

THEN said the high priest, *Are these things so?*

This question meant "guilty" or "not guilty." The high priest asked whether Stephen had really spoken against the holy place and the law, and if so whether he would stand to his words. Stephen in his answer quite forgot himself and his danger, he only thought how best to justify God's ways and bring home Divine truth to his hearers. He was glad to get such a chance of winning his nation to Christ.

2. *And he said, Men, brethren, and fathers, hearken; The God of glory appeared unto our father Abraham, when he was in Mesopotamia, before he dwelt in Charran,*

God's glory was not limited to the holy place. Abraham had communion with God long before he came near Palestine. Stephen was seeking to show that revelations had been given in many places and at many times. All the various appearances of God led up to that gracious visit when He came among us in the person of His dear Son.

3. *And said unto him, Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and come into the land which I shall shew thee.*

Abraham represents to us our baptismal covenant. We have to renounce, as he had, what is naturally pleasant to us; we have to believe mysteries and attempt hard things; we have promised to live by faith, to pass through this life resting on promises for hereafter. Bring us, Lord, at last after all our wanderings into that true land of peace, where nothing shall unsettle us any more.

4. *Then came he out of the land of the Chaldeans, and dwelt in Charran: and from thence, when his father was dead, he removed him into this land, wherein ye now dwell.* 5. *And*

he gave him none inheritance in it, no, not so much as to set his foot on : yet he promised that he would give it to him for a possession, and to his seed after him, when as yet he had no child.

Abraham was God's friend and enjoyed high communion with Him, yet the Holy Land was not his, he had no city, no temple. His example is a comfort to those who are lonely ; they have few to enter into their feelings, they have no prospects here below ; but God is their strength. He has eternal hopes and blessings for them greater than this world can hold.

6. *And God spake on this wise, That his seed should sojourn in a strange land ; and that they should bring them into bondage, and entreat them evil four hundred years.*

The chosen seed had to endure exile and bondage, and pass through many years of waiting. They were inheritors of the glorious promise and yet had to suffer and wait. Is it strange if God deals with us in like manner ? His plans are long in working out, yet at last they are accomplished. Those who trust in Him through gloomy days will see brightness come back in His good time.

7. *And the nation to whom they shall be in bondage will I judge, said God : and after that shall they come forth, and serve me in this place.*

God delivers us from our enemies that we may serve Him with a joyful heart. Remember we must not expect to be set free at once. He has His own time for delivering the righteous and punishing the wicked, but His purpose for us at last is that we should come forth out of all our troubles and serve Him with body and soul.

8. *And he gave him the covenant of circumcision : and so Abraham begat Isaac, and circumcised him the eighth day ; and Isaac begat Jacob ; and Jacob begat the twelve patriarchs.*

Now we have a new and better covenant which has taken the place of the old. Holy baptism dedicates us to be God's children, bearing His sign, set apart from evil ways. Abraham, who gave up his son to die ; Isaac, who lay down on the wood to be sacrificed, and was yet raised up to life ; Jacob, who sent out his twelve sons to be the founders of the chosen people, shadow forth to us works wrought by Father, Son, and Holy Ghost for our salvation.

9. *And the patriarchs, moved with envy, sold Joseph into Egypt : but God was with him, 10. and delivered him out of all his afflictions, and gave him favour and wisdom in the sight of Pharaoh king of Egypt ; and he made him governor over Egypt and all his house.*

Jacob's sons envied their brother, sought his life, sold him. He was in afflictions, in a dungeon, was at last delivered and raised to Pharaoh's right hand. We have to tell of One Who was betrayed and put to death, Who was raised up gloriously and set on the right hand of God. Joseph's varying fortunes remind us of One Who was holier, and worse used, and more gloriously delivered than he was. We come to Him now, as Joseph's brethren came to Joseph, asking for pardon, and life, and blessing.

11. Now there came a dearth over all the land of Egypt and Chanaan, and great affliction: and our fathers found no sustenance.

God's Providence ordered all this. It served to bring about the descent of Joseph's brothers into Egypt, and their being recognised by him; and last of all the removal of Jacob, and the sojourn of his family there. In like manner the sad events of our own day—war, and famine, and pestilence—all bear their part in God's plan; they work out His wise designs for our welfare. Afflictions do not come by chance, but according to His mercy Who orders all things well. The patriarchs would never have found the rich land of Goshen but for the famine first.

12. But when Jacob heard that there was corn in Egypt, he sent out our fathers first. 13. And at the second time Joseph was made known to his brethren; and Joseph's kindred was made known unto Pharaoh.

We all know that beautiful story, how Joseph's brothers perceived that their brother whom they had sold was still alive, and was mighty in power and glory; we have read how they entreated his pardon, and he forgave and cherished them. Stephen meant the Jews to turn to One greater and holier than Joseph, Whom they had sold and ill-used, and to entreat His forgiveness. We too have neglected Him and forgotten His great love for us.

14. Then sent Joseph, and called his father Jacob to him, and all his kindred, threescore and fifteen souls.

That household was the Church in those days, the society where the true God was worshipped, His laws obeyed, and the promises handed down from father to son. It was small in numbers then, but how widely it has spread now throughout the world! God grant that we may never lose our part in that society. How wretched it would be for God's children to forget His mercies and promises and become like Egyptians or Canaanites! God keep in our minds a living remembrance that we are the heirs of heaven.

15. So Jacob went down into Egypt, and died, he, and our fathers, 16. and were carried over into Sychem, and laid in the sepulchre that Abraham bought for a sum of money of the sons of Emmor the father of Sychem.

All they got of Canaan was a grave there. Jacob was laid in Abraham's grave. Joseph (and perhaps his brothers) at Sychem. They died trusting in that power and goodness which had so mercifully guided them. Their very bodies were laid in the land where God's praises would be heard and faithful prayers ascend to His throne. It matters not much how or where I may be buried, yet I would prefer that my decaying body should await the resurrection morning in holy ground, and that words of faith and prayer should be heard over it. If it is a weakness in me to feel thus, I share it with many generations of believers.

17. But when the time of the promise drew nigh, which God had sworn to Abraham, the people grew and multiplied in Egypt, 18. till another king arose, which knew not Joseph. 19. The same dealt subtilly with our kindred, and evil entreated our fathers, so that they cast out their young children, to the end they might not live.

God's people then were oppressed, they were slaves with a daily fear of utter destruction. One might have visited great Egypt and admired its wisdom and glory without noticing the poor Israelites, who were oppressed and ground down to the earth. Worldly eyes would not discern God's servants. Something the same may happen nowadays. God sees with very different eyes from ours. All that is most renowned, and glorious, and wise, and mighty is worth nothing before Him in comparison with the prayers of a true heart. He passes over great Pharaoh's grandeur and blesses lowly homes.

20. In which time Moses was born, and was exceeding fair, and nourished up in his father's house three months: 21. and when he was cast out, Pharaoh's daughter took him up, and nourished him for her own son.

Stephen begins to dwell on the history of Moses, who redeemed God's people from bondage and gave them a heavenly law. All through he is thinking of a greater Redeemer and Diviner Teacher, One Who chose right more bravely, showed more sympathy with the suffering, was more shamefully rejected, won a greater victory than Moses could. Even the sacred infancy of Christ was in danger from king Herod, like that of Moses from Pharaoh.

22. And Moses was learned in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and was mighty in words and in deeds.

Moses had in Pharaoh's court pleasures and honours, nay more, opportunities to distinguish himself and science to fill his mind. All that the world knew in those days was taught there; what more could he want? Nay, something was lacking. The heart may remain unfilled when brain, and hand, and tongue are all nobly gifted. Lord, teach us Thy wisdom, which is deeper and truer than all that human learning can discover. Simple persons may profit in Thy school.

23. And when he was full forty years old, it came into his heart to visit his brethren the children of Israel.

So in the fulness of time Divine wisdom appeared on earth in the person of Jesus Christ, and visited mankind to comfort and raise them up. The oppressed Israelites had waited long for a deliverer, just as mankind had to wait many ages before their Saviour came.

24. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended him, and avenged him that was oppressed, and smote the Egyptian : 25. for he supposed his brethren would have understood how that God by his hand would deliver them : but they understood not.

Christ's mission was a peaceable one. He came to save life, not to punish. Yet His zeal against sin which was oppressing mankind was akin to the spirit of Moses, who could not bear to see his brethren cruelly used. Moses could not restrain his wrath when he saw ill-usage going on. He stood forward to defend the sufferer. Jesus our Lord and His saints carried this same boldness into the warfare against sin and death.

26. And the next day he shewed himself unto them as they strove, and would have set them at one again, saying, Sirs, ye are brethren ; why do ye wrong one to another ?

Are we not brethren, God's creatures, Christ's redeemed, having a common inheritance of mercy, suffering common cares and trials, journeying towards a common home? One day selfishness will appear in its true light as a wrong done to God. He bade us live in peace together and prepare for the great deliverance so soon to be manifested. Christians are bound together by stronger ties of faith and hope than Israelites were.

27. But he that did his neighbour wrong thrust him away, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge over us ? 28. wilt thou kill me, as thou diddest the Egyptian yesterday ?

So God's people could reject their deliverer and even reproach and despise him. If Moses was treated so, it is not wonderful that Christ should experience the same. The Redeemer may be sent by God and yet not discerned by men; it is in our power to set ourselves against God's merciful designs for our salvation.

29. Then fled Moses at this saying, and was a stranger in the land of Midian, where he begat two sons.

Moses spent long lonely years. He kept the sheep and brought up his family, yet faith remained deep in his heart. Though no one else shared his feelings, yet he never gave up the hope that God would fulfil His promise and redeem His people. Christians have

sometimes no one to feel with them ; they are as strangers in their dearest hopes and prayers, yet they persevere, even though they seem alone.

30. *And when forty years were expired, there appeared to him in the wilderness of mount Sina an angel of the Lord in a flame of fire in a bush.*

At last the great day of deliverance came. God's glory appeared, yet it was veiled beneath the unconsuming fire. Moses could not look on God's face, but he saw the fire which was a sign of His presence. Just so, when God appeared on earth as our Saviour He veiled His glory beneath the form of man. The thorn bush which glowed with heavenly fire figures to us Christ's sacred human nature all penetrated with the Divine glory.

31. *When Moses saw it, he wondered at the sight : and as he drew near to behold it, the voice of the Lord came unto him, 32. saying, I am the God of thy fathers, the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob. Then Moses trembled, and durst not behold.*

This appearance of God to Moses introduced the covenant and worship of the law, as the appearance to Abraham, which Stephen had mentioned in verse 2, had introduced the patriarchal dispensation. Both these looked onward to another and greater revelation to come, one still fuller of love and mercy, revealing God more clearly, drawing man into closer union with Him. It is indeed wonderful that the eternal and infinite God should enter into communion with us creatures, it is awful and confounding to think of ; and yet we are made in His image, there is a spark of heavenly fire in us. God grant we may not quench it.

33. *Then said the Lord to him, Put off thy shoes from thy feet : for the place where thou standest is holy ground.*

That spot of ground was not the temple. Wherever God appears is holy ground. Our churches are holy, the place where we say our prayers is holy. God's Word is a kind of holy ground too, and requires us to read it reverently. Our own minds and bodies are consecrated. It was foolish of the Israelites to exaggerate the reverence due to God's temple, and suppose that He could never be manifested in any other place. He is always near us.

34. *I have seen, I have seen the affliction of my people which is in Egypt, and I have heard their groaning, and am come down to deliver them. And now come, I will send thee into Egypt.*

Must there not be a revelation? Would God leave His creatures in entire darkness as to their duty and prospects? Our very affliction,

our weight of care, the shortness and vanity of life, the burden of sin, drive us to the Cross, which is the declaration of redeeming mercy. If this life is like the house of bondage, all the more eagerly must we welcome that merciful Lord Who promises us freedom. If everything went well here below I might get on without the Gospel, but as things are I cannot do without my Saviour.

35. This Moses whom they refused, saying, Who made thee a ruler and a judge? the same did God send to be a ruler and a deliverer by the hand of the angel which appeared to him in the bush. 36. He brought them out, after that he had shewed wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red sea, and in the wilderness forty years.

Christ the Lord was rejected and crucified, yet God raised Him up to give life to His people. He works miracles for our souls, delivering them from bondage, giving them heavenly food, protecting them from enemies, conducting them into the land of promise.

37. ¶ This is that Moses, which said unto the children of Israel, A prophet shall the Lord your God raise up unto you of your brethren, like unto me; him shall ye hear.

Moses was not the first of God's messengers, nor was he the last. He spoke of another Prophet to Whom Israel should listen with reverence, a Prophet Who should reveal God in a manner suited to their needs. It was a mistake to accept Moses and forget the great Teacher Who was to succeed him. I welcome Christ the Lord under this aspect of the Divine Prophet. I desire to learn from Him day by day. Moses is gone, but Christ remains always able to instruct us.

38. This is he, that was in the church in the wilderness with the angel which spake to him in the mount Sinai, and with our fathers: who received the lively oracles to give unto us:

In the Jewish Church were God's prophets, and His worship, and His law. The Jews had living oracles; they handed down from father to son the record of a true redemption, the knowledge of a living God. All this is now part of a fuller revelation which has completed it. Our Church, our ministers, our Bible, our faith are still the same, but grown better, and deeper, and more life-giving than in Jewish times.

39. To whom our fathers would not obey, but thrust him from them, and in their hearts turned back again into Egypt, 40. saying unto Aaron, Make us gods to go before us: for as for this Moses, which brought us out of the land of Egypt, we wot not what is become of him.

Many Jews in the apostolic days did this. They rejected the Redeemer, and refused to listen to Moses when he pointed onward to Christ. Many Christians nowadays do the same. They turn back again to the world after having chosen God's side. They prefer the idol feasts to God's service. Lord, keep us looking ever onward, make us obey Thy gracious leading all our life through.

41. And they made a calf in those days, and offered sacrifice unto the idol, and rejoiced in the works of their own hands.

What a downfall for God's ransomed people! They forgot the covenant God of Israel, they despised His law and promises. This shows us that a high calling is not enough. We may have been near God, and beheld His glory, and yet fall terribly. Who can hope to stand when so many go after idols? These thoughts should keep us humble.

42. Then God turned, and gave them up to worship the host of heaven; as it is written in the book of the prophets, O ye house of Israel, have ye offered to me slain beasts and sacrifices by the space of forty years in the wilderness? 43. Yea, ye took up the tabernacle of Moloch, and the star of your god Remphan, figures which ye made to worship them: and I will carry you away beyond Babylon.

Stephen desires to abase Jewish pride. He says that even in the wilderness, accompanied as they were with tokens of Divine mercy, they yet were idolaters in heart. He would have them recognise their national transgressions, which came to a head in the crucifixion of God's Son. So he relates God's sharp reproaches and warnings to them. But, alas! the words suit too well with much of our Christian worship. It seems to be true, and yet we are putting our secret idols in the highest place. We bring our evil thoughts and covetous desires into God's house.

44. Our fathers had the tabernacle of witness in the wilderness, as he had appointed, speaking unto Moses, that he should make it according to the fashion that he had seen.

Before the temple was built, God's Presence was revealed in the tabernacle or sacred tent which Moses framed according to Divine command. It was carried from place to place as a witness of God's abiding Presence wherever His people journeyed. Through it Jewish hearts learned to believe and adore, yet it was but a figure of a truer worship and brighter glory which this world could not contain.

45. Which also our fathers that came after brought in with Jesus into the possession of the Gentiles, whom God drove out before the face of our fathers, unto the days of David;

Believers found communion with their God all those years of the Old Testament dispensation, long before there was any temple. Joshua enjoyed God's victorious help. He received that gracious promise, "I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee." Many heroes and saints drew strength from their prayers. What can overcome him who believes firmly that God is on his side? Our God is still as mighty as in the old days. He can bring His people through dangers and distresses. His promises last on.

46. Who found favour before God, and desired to find a tabernacle for the God of Jacob.

Still there was no temple in David's day. He desired to see God's glory enshrined in some fit dwelling. It grieved him to dwell in a palace, and that God should be poorly lodged. He prayed over it, and made preparation, and did his best to frame a worthy design for God's house. Let us, when all things prosper in our hands, not forget the house of God, that ought to show some tokens of our prosperity. Why should that be mean and shabby, while we dwell honourably?

47. But Solomon built him an house.

First had come the tabernacle, then in its due place the temple succeeded; after that a still higher service, that of Christ's Holy Catholic Church. Solomon was right in spending all the wealth and skill at his command to build a worthy dwelling for God, but if we decorate our hearts with faith and love they are better temples than his was. All that gold and carving is nothing compared with the heart's service.

48. Howbeit the most High dwelleth not in temples made with hands; as saith the prophet, 49. Heaven is my throne, and earth is my footstool: what house will ye build me? saith the Lord: or what is the place of my rest? 50. Hath not my hand made all these things?

Do not think that God's Presence is limited to any sacred building, we ourselves and all we possess are His. He is our Master. Religion is not a matter for holy days and holy places only, but for daily life. God is a Spirit, He is ever near us for our help and support. His dear Son has been pleased to take our nature and dwell in it so as to reveal His brotherhood with us. I desire to remember this truth, that I myself, and all I have, and all good that there is in me, belong wholly to my Redeemer.

51. ¶ Ye stiffnecked and uncircumcised in heart and ears, ye do always resist the Holy Ghost: as your fathers did, so do ye.

Keep us, Lord, from this Jewish spirit of resistance to Thy truth. Let us follow the pattern of devout and earnest believers, not of the

ungodly. Those are happy who have good examples set them at home, and those who are less fortunate may yet have their eyes opened by Divine grace to choose the better side. Sometimes God uses the very sins and miseries of our fathers to warn us into the right way.

52. Which of the prophets have not your fathers persecuted? and they have slain them which shewed before of the coming of the Just One; of whom ye have been now the betrayers and murderers:

Alas! when the Just One came this was the welcome He got. His saints in all ages have found the same. If we have laid out our path to follow Christ and His friends we must make up our minds to encounter adversaries as they did. Is it likely that we can reach heaven by a perfectly easy road?

53. Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it.

Angels ministered at the giving of the law, but God's own Son in the giving of the Gospel. How much more, then, are we to blame than were the Jews if we despise or misuse that? Think what God has done for you, the privileges, mercies, inspirations, graces, He has shown you, and what your guilt would be if you threw it all away. Do not wonder if Stephen speaks sharp words of warning, and bids his hearers beware of fighting against God.

54. ¶ When they heard these things, they were cut to the heart, and they gnashed on him with their teeth.

If the news of Divine love does not bring conviction, it brings annoyance. To hear of a holy God, of a merciful Saviour, of the need of conversion, about true devotion and preparation for heaven, is only hateful to unbelievers. They utterly despise and scorn it. Do not we know well many who feel thus about religion. God grant that their vexation may be turned into true hatred of their own sins.

55. But he, being full of the Holy Ghost, looked up steadfastly into heaven, and saw the glory of God, and Jesus standing on the right hand of God, 56. and said, Behold, I see the heavens opened, and the Son of man standing on the right hand of God.

God favours greatly those who stand up boldly for Him. What did Stephen care for threats and blows when he could see the merciful Face of his glorified Saviour? This world's promises and revilings were as nothing to him now. Yet we may be sure that Stephen must have often sought Christ in prayer, often pondered over His holy words and Divine example, often ascended in heart to heaven, before this surpassing vision was granted him.

57. Then they cried out with a loud voice, and stopped their

ears, and ran upon him with one accord, 58. and cast him out of the city, and stoned him: and the witnesses laid down their clothes at a young man's feet, whose name was Saul.

This is not an end that flesh and blood would choose, and yet we reverence it as the first Christian martyrdom. It is remembered next to our Lord's own birthday. It is the pattern of all noble self-sacrificing deaths since. Faith sees in it a heroic patience which taunts, and blows, and curses could not upset. Saul even, as he looked on, had strange thoughts in his mind.

59. And they stoned Stephen, calling upon God, and saying, Lord Jesus, receive my spirit.

O blessed Lord Jesus, let me die, like Stephen, with firm faith in Thy Divine glory, and trust in Thy mercy. I tremble at the thought of death if I look only at my own infinite follies, but Thy love as shown for me in the Gospel is much greater than my vileness. I worship Thee as true God, and trust in Thy gracious promises. Thou wilt not forsake me in the hour of death.

60. And he kneeled down, and cried with a loud voice, Lord, lay not this sin to their charge. And when he had said this, he fell asleep.

If the saints prayed thus for the forgiveness of sinners, and prayed no doubt so powerfully and effectively (for Saul's conversion was granted to this prayer), can we doubt they continue to pray still, where they dwell with God? I believe that they join in our intercessions, and plead for us before God. Our communions, our prayers, are one with the more prevailing service that goes on in a better place than this. Death could make no change in Stephen except draw him nearer to God and enable him to pray better than on earth.

CHAPTER VIII.

- i. By occasion of the persecution in Jerusalem, the church being planted in Samaria, 5. by Philip the deacon, who preached, did miracles, and baptized many, among the rest Simon the sorcerer, a great seducer of the people: 14. Peter and John come to confirm and enlarge the church: where, by prayer and imposition of hands giving the Holy Ghost, 18. when Simon would have bought the like power of them, 20. Peter sharply reproving his hypocrisy, and covetousness, and exhorting him to repentance, together with John preaching the word of the Lord, return to Jerusalem. 26. But the angel sendeth Philip to teach, and baptize the Ethiopian eunuch.

AND Saul was consenting unto his death. And at that time there was a great persecution against the church which

was at Jerusalem ; and they were all scattered abroad throughout the regions of Judaea and Samaria, except the apostles.

The sunshine days for the Church were over. Instead of favour with all the people, Christians enjoyed now only contempt and hatred. Yet God ordered it so for the greater perfection of His saints, and that the Gospel might be widely dispersed abroad. When persecution falls upon us we may remember that we are heirs of the holy saints and martyrs, and if we have their faith and hope, it is not strange if we get a taste of their sufferings also.

2. And devout men carried Stephen to his burial, and made great lamentation over him.

Why did they lament for one who had triumphed so gloriously and was now in heaven with his Master? They grieved for the Church's loss and for their own ; they thought of all the good he was doing, and of his sudden and violent end. Faith indeed soared upward and thought of Stephen in glory, but human tears and affections dwelt on his lifeless body and grieved to see him no more. It is not wrong to feel thus divided between joy and grief. One day all the sorrow will be gone and only the joy left.

3. As for Saul, he made havock of the church, entering into every house, and haling men and women committed them to prison.

Ah, how we forget to thank God for the peaceable exercise of our religion! What would have become of our faith in days when inquisitors sought out and punished all those who served God in simplicity? Glory be to His mercy for sparing us the sharp trials which these early saints had to bear.

4. Therefore they that were scattered abroad went every where preaching the word.

This message was "good news, good news." Christ had taught it long before in that very country, and these missionaries sought to revive His doctrine and speak of His Death and Resurrection. He had sown the good seed, and they cherished it. The Word was one of joy, and forgiveness, and eternal life; those who received it won an infinite treasure.

5. Then Philip went down to the city of Samaria, and preached Christ unto them.

The Samaritans had welcomed Christ the Lord when He preached to them Himself (John iv. 41, 42). They had believed Him far more readily than His own countrymen did, and now the time was come for them to become His servants and learn the full history of all His sufferings and triumph. They must have willingly believed that He Whose words to them had been so mighty was indeed their Saviour, and Redeemer, and Lord.

6. And the people with one accord gave heed unto those things which Philip spake, hearing and seeing the miracles which he did. 7. For unclean spirits, crying with loud voice, came out of many that were possessed with them: and many taken with palsies, and that were lame, were healed.

Such signs do not follow literally on Gospel preaching amongst ourselves, yet unclean passions are cast out of the heart, dull minds are enlightened, cold hearts are kindled, hopeless lives brightened by the power of God's Word. All these are miracles of an inward and spiritual kind, and we thank God's grace for them.

8. And there was great joy in that city.

True Christianity is not a dull or melancholy thing, it does not oblige us to be miserable. No, it is a spring of delight, it makes us break forth into hymns of joy. Is it no pleasure to get free from evil habits, to be able to look any one in the face, to lie down with a good conscience, to enjoy pure love and common devotion, to have a good hope of heaven? Why, sin has not half this happiness.

9. But there was a certain man, called Simon, which before-time in the same city used sorcery, and bewitched the people of Samaria, giving out that himself was some great one: 10. to whom they all gave heed, from the least to the greatest, saying, This man is the great power of God.

Simon had a reputation for great power. His strange learning and winning words, and the wonderful things he did, had persuaded these poor people that he was God in visible form; but when God's true messengers came, the difference was seen. In those days true faith had almost died out, people were groping for a new religion, and ready to put up with any shadows of one. All was ready for the Gospel to appear.

11. And to him they had regard, because that of long time he had bewitched them with sorceries. 12. But when they believed Philip preaching the things concerning the kingdom of God, and the name of Jesus Christ, they were baptized, both men and women.

Lord, help us to discern Thy truth, keep us from being caught by false teachers. Often the devil's messengers bring all manner of lofty gifts; their words are eloquent, their books weighty; how else but by Thy mercy should Thy children escape their snares? I believe that in large cities nowadays there are many lecturers and writers who bewitch young Christians and lead them to forget their profession.

13. Then Simon himself believed also: and when he was

baptized, he continued with Philip, and wondered, beholding the miracles and signs which were done.

Did Simon believe sincerely, or was it merely an outward pretence in order to get at the secret of Philip's wonder-working powers? We cannot tell. God only knows the heart, but we can take warning lest we turn our own church-going into means of worldly profit. Christian profession is not enough, nay, wonder, and interest, and study of religion are not enough. We need to catch a sight of God's love and our own misery, that is better for us than the sight of ever so many miracles.

14. *Now when the apostles which were at Jerusalem heard that Samaria had received the word of God, they sent unto them Peter and John:*

The apostles desired to show that Jews and Samaritans were now all made one in Christ. The ancient hatred was done away, and the same pastors, same creed, same prayers and sacraments belonged to both. S. Peter could speak best in public about our Lord's claims and glories. Perhaps S. John could tell to individuals more about His goodness than any one else knew of.

15. *Who, when they were come down, prayed for them, that they might receive the Holy Ghost: 16. (for as yet he was fallen upon none of them: only they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.) 17. Then laid they their hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.*

This was not quite the same as our Confirmation, for our bishops are not altogether in the apostles' place, nor do visible gifts of the Spirit follow on the ordinance of Confirmation in these days. Yet we see here the first beginning of the Church's custom, whereby, ever since the apostle's days, baptized Christians are presented to the bishop, profess their faith before him, and are then blessed with laying on of hands and prayer for God's Holy Spirit. The apostles here set us the example which the Church has always followed since. That Holy Spirit Who attended on their ministry is no less with us in our Confirmation hour.

18. *And when Simon saw that through laying on of the apostles' hands the Holy Ghost was given, he offered them money, 19. saying, Give me also this power, that on whomsoever I lay hands, he may receive the Holy Ghost.*

Simon saw that wonderful results followed on the ministry of the apostles, so he thought such a power was worth buying; it would be more useful to him than all his former craft. He is the type of all those who traffic in holy things, who view the Church as an establishment where money is to be got; they forget inward calling, Divine grace, the serious responsibilities of Holy Communion, of

ordination, of institution to a living. In their eyes all is a mere decent cloak for gain.

20. But Peter said unto him, Thy money perish with thee, because thou hast thought that the gift of God may be purchased with money.

God's gifts are won by prayer, the world's advantages are bought by money; it would be a grievous mistake to mix up the one with the other. Money can get many useful things, many comforts; it can be used for great purposes, it is a talent in the hands of those who have it. But Divine grace, a conscience at peace, a spark of heavenly love, are not to be bought for all the wealth of London; they belong to quite a different world.

21. Thou hast neither part nor lot in this matter: for thy heart is not right in the sight of God.

It is a grave matter for Christian ministers to consider whether they may not come under this rebuke. If we took Holy Orders only to get a decent living, or accepted a work to be done because it would make us rich, or dealt with people's souls in order to be rewarded by their gifts, we might find ourselves outside God's grace, as Simon did. Suddenly it was revealed what manner of man he was; perhaps he himself did not know till Peter spoke how entirely he had neglected the substance of religion and only put on the outside.

22. Repent therefore of this thy wickedness, and pray God, if perhaps the thought of thine heart may be forgiven thee. 23. For I perceive that thou art in the gall of bitterness, and in the bond of iniquity.

Repentance and prayer are the two resources of sinners. We may have within us the poison of sin, we may be fast bound by evil habits, yet God's grace is able to deliver us. The first thing is to recognise our own condition. Unless we see how grievous our state is, how shall we repent in earnest? Lord, open our eyes that we may see our own selves, and know whether we are in Thy favour or not.

24. Then answered Simon, and said, Pray ye to the Lord for me, that none of these things which ye have spoken come upon me.

This was fear rather than godly sorrow. Simon did not go on to repent and pray for himself, but soon left the Christian Church and resumed his former life; not even apostles' words, not the daily sight of miracles, could touch his heart. He was all the worse for having been brought so near heavenly things.

25. And they, when they had testified and preached the word of the Lord, returned to Jerusalem, and preached the gospel in many villages of the Samaritans.

All this came out of the persecution. Stephen was gone, but his blood, and example, and prayers had spread the Gospel far more widely than he could do in his life. May we not think that he still, though unseen, watched with gratitude the work of grace? He could not forget the Church and the friends whom he had been linked with here below, though his praises and prayers were now offered in a better manner than on earth.

26. And the angel of the Lord spake unto Philip, saying, Arise, and go toward the south unto the way that goeth down from Jerusalem unto Gaza, which is desert.

God may not speak to us directly by an angel, but how often He puts good suggestions in our hearts! He bids us put away our sloth and rise to seek out some one in darkness, visit some neglected soul, do some kindness. He suggests to us some good work we could undertake for Him. It will be happy for us if we have obeyed His gracious call. Philip must have rejoiced afterwards that he had gone on this journey.

27. And he arose and went: and, behold, a man of Ethiopia, an eunuch of great authority under Candace queen of the Ethiopians, who had the charge of all her treasure, and had come to Jerusalem for to worship, 28. was returning, and sitting in his chariot read Esaias the prophet.

How this man must have loved to learn about the true God! He was an Ethiopian, and lived in the interior of Africa, many hundred miles away from Palestine. He had wealth, honour, and public business in his hands. Yet he had sought out and found God, had eagerly embraced the opportunity of coming to God's temple, was employing his journey in reading God's Word. He must have overcome difficulties of all kinds. How different from our case, who are so easily hindered from devotion! God recompensed his zeal by leading him on into the full light of the Gospel.

29. Then the Spirit said unto Philip, Go near, and join thyself to this chariot.

Here was Philip's work. No fear or shyness was to keep him back, he had a message to bring from God to the traveller. I wish exceedingly that I was bolder to speak for God. How often I lose opportunities of doing my Master's business! Oh that I could keep my lips in a fit state to enter on holy things at any time!

30. And Philip ran thither to him, and heard him read the prophet Esaias, and said, Understandest thou what thou readest?

31. And he said, How can I, except some man should guide me? And he desired Philip that he would come up and sit with him.

Our own ignorance is the foundation on which God builds. If we suppose that all is clear we shall remain in darkness; but God mercifully bids us recognise how little we know, and then His Holy Spirit is ready to teach us. Scripture should be studied by all, yet we thankfully acknowledge that it requires an interpreter; it is intrusted to the Church, which preserves it and shows its true meaning. Yes, I read my Bible, and see it has a meaning for me; but I read it as a Christian, with Christian faith and teaching to guide me, and I depend for light on God's grace, not merely on my own wits.

32. The place of the scripture which he read was this, He was led as a sheep to the slaughter; and like a lamb dumb before his shearer, so opened he not his mouth: 33. in his humiliation his judgment was taken away: and who shall declare his generation? for his life is taken from the earth.

That great fifty-third chapter of Isaiah has always been a difficulty to unbelievers and a great comfort to believers. Who is the servant of the Lord Who appears there so mysteriously, Who is despised and rejected, hurriedly put to death, dies with the wicked and yet with the rich, yet bears His people's sins and wins a victory by His very sufferings? What a strange union of shame and glory! There is no martyr and no prophet who can fill up all the outline except the King of Martyrs, the Divine Teacher. Without Christ Jesus the passage seems never to have had all its fulfilment.

34. And the eunuch answered Philip, and said, I pray thee, of whom speaketh the prophet this? of himself, or of some other man? 35. Then Philip opened his mouth, and began at the same scripture, and preached unto him Jesus.

Here is the right key. Philip knew how to unlock all the difficulties of this passage. The Divine glory of Jesus, His Cross and sufferings, His atoning Death, His victory, His offer of pardon to all who believe,—these truths fill up the measure of the prophecy; they meet all the requirements of the Scripture. And so they do the requirements of our own heart; this key fits the innermost windings there. Our Lord's Divine work, and words, and mercies are the message that we needed; as we listen it all comes home to us.

36. And as they went on their way, they came unto a certain water: and the eunuch said, See, here is water; what doth hinder me to be baptized? 37. And Philip said, If thou believest with all thine heart, thou mayest. And he answered and said, I believe that Jesus Christ is the Son of God.

Evidently the Ethiopian had learned from Philip about the Sacraments; he had been told that Christ the Lord had appointed a society of

believers, which was to be entered through the gate of Holy Baptism. Therefore he desired to fulfil all the commands of his new Master. He was not contented with believing, but would seek a blessing through appointed means; he asked to be admitted into that holy fellowship and become an inheritor of the promises.

38. And he commanded the chariot to stand still : and they went down both into the water, both Philip and the eunuch ; and he baptized him. 39. And when they were come up out of the water, the Spirit of the Lord caught away Philip, that the eunuch saw him no more : and he went on his way rejoicing.

He had a spell now which always made him joyful.

"No glare of high estate,
No gloom of woe or want,"

could take it away. The precious treasure of faith in Christ lay deep within. When he got back to Ethiopia, the court, and his business, and his life outwardly seemed the same, but how great was the difference within, now that he was one of Christ's ransomed people !

40. But Philip was found at Azotus : and passing through he preached in all the cities, till he came to Cæsarea.

In those days the Gospel was daily winning victories, faith grew and increased in the world. Christ's soldiers could not rest till they had assaulted the world's strongholds. Alas, how patient we are now while so large a share of the earth remains in darkness ! We let the world reign supreme, and make no effort to bring the best of all blessings home to those who need it most.

CHAPTER IX.

1. Saul, going towards Damascus, 4. is stricken down to the earth, 10. is called to the apostleship, 18. and is baptized by Ananias. 20. He preacheth Christ boldly. 23. The Jews lay wait to kill him : 29. so do the Grecians, but he escapeth both. 31. The church having rest, Peter healeth Aeneas of the palsy, 36. and restoreth Tabitha to life.

AND Saul, yet breathing out threatenings and slaughter against the disciples of the Lord, went unto the high priest, 2. and desired of him letters to Damascus to the synagogues, that if he found any of this way, whether they were men or women, he might bring them bound unto Jerusalem.

Here is the great missionary, the leader of saints, the gifted teacher, whose words have brought home Christian truth to all people.

This is the man who was to endure, and conquer, and experience more wonderfully than any other believer. See, he is at present reviling Christ, threatening and ill-using Christians. He abhors the Gospel, his only desire is to put down the Church by every weapon of hatred and scorn. If the Lord could make such a change in Saul, why should I despair of any one? I do not see why such a conversion might not be wrought in the hardest and profanest heart.

3. And as he journeyed, he came near Damascus : and suddenly there shined round about him a light from heaven :

This heavenly light represents the new light from above which was now about to open on Saul's mind. Up to this point he had been in darkness, but now a ray of Divine mercy shone upon him. It was no study, no prayers, no efforts of his own that could secure this light, but it shone from above. How poor is this world's light compared to that bright heavenly ray which shows us God, and ourselves, and the way to live and die!

4. And he fell to the earth, and heard a voice saying unto him, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ?

His insults, his cruelties, had been directed against the Lord of glory. Jesus took as done to Himself all the ill-usage which His poor members had met with at Saul's hands. I should like to bring home that lesson to my own conscience. Any insult, or unkindness, or harshness shown to the helpless is an outrage to Jesus. He, though unseen, notes it down against me. The voice asks why I let my temper, or evil desires, or carelessness treat my Lord so ill when He approaches me in some one of His children.

5. And he said, Who art thou, Lord ? And the Lord said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest : it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks. 6. And he trembling and astonished said, Lord, what wilt thou have me to do ? And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the city, and it shall be told thee what thou must do.

How many souls since that day have been converted after Saul's example! They have felt their own sins and the terrors of God's wrath. They have been overthrown and confounded, have groped for a while in darkness. Thus the merciful promises of the Lord Jesus have come home to their heart, they have risen up to lead a new life and do work for their Saviour. It is not in the same way with all, for God's dealings with souls are infinitely various, and yet the same sense of their own misery and the same disclosure of a Divine Redeemer full of mercy belong to all the truly converted.

7. And the men which journeyed with him stood speechless, hearing a voice, but seeing no man.

They had not understood the Lord of glory when He spoke, nor seen His Divine countenance; all they had observed was a marvellous light and sound which they could not explain, while it had gone straight to Saul's heart. God did not enlighten them from heaven, but left it to Saul to convert them by declaring God's work wrought in himself. Let our part be to listen and obey. God may not speak to us in heavenly splendour, His voice may not make all things plain as yet, but He has given us enough guidance. His mercies and the triumphs of His grace are all around.

8. And Saul arose from the earth; and when his eyes were opened, he saw no man: but they led him by the hand, and brought him into Damascus. 9. And he was three days without sight, and neither did eat nor drink.

What did he think of during these three days? Our Lord's Passion, Stephen's martyrdom, the sufferings and prayers of the Christians whom he had ill-used, the vanity of his own efforts, his wretched state before God,—all these filled his thoughts and weighed him to the earth. He could not bear to live with such anguish upon him. Yet all this dark sad time was a part of God's merciful ordering. Saul had to go through it that he might find peace afterwards.

10. ¶ And there was a certain disciple at Damascus, named Ananias; and to him said the Lord in a vision, Ananias. And he said, Behold, I am here, Lord.

God had a great work for Ananias to do, to teach and baptize the great apostle S. Paul. He is pleased to make use of the humblest persons and simplest means to work out His purposes. His grace descends from above, and yet we receive it through human ministrations, and often through those whom we should least have thought of. Those who are ready to work for God, who listen for His voice daily, will find He has tasks for them to do.

11. And the Lord said unto him, Arise, and go into the street which is called Straight, and enquire in the house of Judas for one called Saul, of Tarsus: for, behold, he prayeth, 12. and hath seen in a vision a man named Ananias coming in, and putting his hand on him, that he might receive his sight.

How the Lord knows our streets, our homes, our occupations! No doubt in our own town His eye is on such or such a street; He observes each family, He knows what they are about, He can tell if they pray. O Lord, let me never forget that all my secret thoughts are open to Thy all-seeing eye. Let this remembrance purify my lonely moments. Let me be ready to welcome Thy message.

13. Then Ananias answered, Lord, I have heard by many of this man, how much evil he hath done to thy saints at Jeru-

salem: 14. and here he hath authority from the chief priests to bind all that call on thy name.

Christians were known as Christ's saints, as a people who called on Christ's Name. They were despised and oppressed by the world. Holiness, prayer, and patience were their distinguishing marks. They belonged to Christ the Lord, and were known as His. Here are signs of religion which we should look out for; it is true, if it is of this kind.

15. But the Lord said unto him, Go thy way: for he is a chosen vessel unto me, to bear my name before the Gentiles, and kings, and the children of Israel:

God had found His chosen instrument. Here was the man to do the work of converting the world. God had so framed S. Paul's character, so endowed him with the due gifts, so ordered all his career, that he should be ready when the time came to be the first and chief of missionaries. This seeming unbeliever and persecutor was to be the most powerful winner of souls. There are some now who live in unbelief or sin who are yet chosen vessels. Lord, make manifest Thy gracious designs for them, inspire them with readiness to obey Thy call.

16. For I will shew him how great things he must suffer for my name's sake.

This was the secret of S. Paul's power over souls, that he had known sufferings. His pains of body and mind, his many adversities, his many disappointments, gave him that deep sympathy which he had for his brethren. He overcame by his very endurance. The prospect of all this did not frighten him back again, for he felt like a soldier desirous to enter the battle, even though he should find wounds and death there.

17. And Ananias went his way, and entered into the house; and putting his hands on him said, Brother Saul, the Lord, even Jesus, that appeared unto thee in the way as thou camest, hath sent me, that thou mightest receive thy sight, and be filled with the Holy Ghost.

Saul had come to lay violent hands on Christians, but here a Christian comes to lay healing hands on him. He had come to bind others, but had himself been bound with chains of darkness and helplessness, and confusion. Now, after his three sad dark days, comes a ray of Divine light again.

18. And immediately there fell from his eyes as it had been scales: and he received sight forthwith, and arose, and was baptized. 19. And when he had received meat, he was strengthened. Then was Saul certain days with the disciples which were at Damascus.

Not even the heavenly vision dispensed with the due receiving of Holy Baptism. This great soul, so Divinely called to believe, yet entered the fold by the same door which was opened for each of us. There he was made a child of God and heir of heaven. How much he must have had to learn from the Christians among whom he came! what daily comfort and guidance God must have poured into his heart! He had made a choice now of which he never repented.

20. And straightway he preached Christ in the synagogues, that he is the Son of God.

This subject lasted him for the next thirty years. He was never weary of declaring that the Lord Jesus was God's Son, and proving it by every kind of argument. More and more depths of Divine goodness appeared in this doctrine the longer he went on declaring it. Lord, let me too, according to my condition, preach Thy Name by my life, and words, and prayers.

21. But all that heard him were amazed, and said; Is not this he that destroyed them which called on this name in Jerusalem, and came hither for that intent, that he might bring them bound unto the chief priests?

Is not this he whose life was a scandal, whose temper was so sharp, who avoided God's house, who joined in all manner of ungodliness, who was selfish or idle? and, lo, what a change! See how he has become a true and zealous servant of Christ. Such are the questions raised by a true conversion to God. We see what a man was, and rejoice at what he is, but we cannot explain the operations of Divine grace. It is God's power, that is enough for us.

22. But Saul increased the more in strength, and confounded the Jews which dwelt at Damascus, proving that this is very Christ.

How did he confound them? Not as he had the poor Christians, by threats and violence. All he did was to show the wonderful agreement of the prophecies with the life and death of Jesus, to declare our Lord's various perfections, the Divine wisdom of His words, the power of His Resurrection. He confounded the Jews by his knowledge of the Old Testament and his skill in showing our Lord as represented there.

23. ¶ And after that many days were fulfilled, the Jews took counsel to kill him: 24. but their laying await was known of Saul. And they watched the gates day and night to kill him.

This is the beginning of his long series of dangers. How many times he was to find himself face to face with death! All his life after his conversion was one of danger and suffering. The smooth, prosperous, triumphant days when he had stood well in men's

favour were gone. He had cast in his lot now with the oppressed, and had to share their troubles.

25. Then the disciples took him by night, and let him down by the wall in a basket.

This is the first of his many escapes. Times without number he was wonderfully delivered from death, till he had finished his work for God. His great calling and prospects did not hinder his making use of kind skilful friends and humble means of escape. As he swung in the night air outside the lofty wall, in such silence and haste, no doubt he felt God's mercy over him. Prayers went with him on his dangerous journey.

26. And when Saul was come to Jerusalem, he assayed to join himself to the disciples: but they were all afraid of him, and believed not that he was a disciple.

Converts have sometimes had this hard experience; their old friends despise them, and their new friends mistrust them. They have no longer pleasure in the world's ways, and yet Christians hold back and refuse to be intimate with them. God give us grace to discern true hearts. Even though they are but entering on the way, we should not drive them back by our too suspicious, jealous silence. May not their Lord and ours have wrought a work of grace within them?

27. But Barnabas took him, and brought him to the apostles, and declared unto them how he had seen the Lord in the way, and that he had spoken to him, and how he had preached boldly at Damascus in the name of Jesus.

This was always the character of S. Barnabas. He loved to do away with misunderstandings and to bring Christians together. He had no jealousy of the greater gifts and powers which S. Paul displayed. He dwelt with gratitude on the wonderful dealings of Christ the Lord with S. Paul's soul. We believe our Lord is really living and mighty, is He not then able to convert the most hardened sinner? Can we doubt His power to do such marvels?

28. And he was with them coming in and going out at Jerusalem. 29. And he spake boldly in the name of the Lord Jesus, and disputed against the Grecians: but they went about to slay him. 30. Which when the brethren knew, they brought him down to Cesarea, and sent him forth to Tarsus.

In great Jerusalem there was no place for his witness, but God had a wider sphere open for him. During this short visit he had had much intercourse with S. Peter and S. James, had learned many new things about our Saviour, had been welcomed as a Christian by the oldest disciples. How many sweet remembrances of our

Lord's gracious words and acts must have lingered still among them, and have confirmed S. Paul every day in his new faith! Now he went back to his own home at Tarsus, to think upon all God's providences over him since the time when he had left it as a boy.

31. Then had the churches rest throughout all Judaea and Galilee and Samaria, and were edified; and walking in the fear of the Lord, and in the comfort of the Holy Ghost, were multiplied.

God brought about this time of rest for His Church. He gives us happy hours, and peaceful homes, and a time when all goes well. Let us in such seasons not forget to fear Him, to pray for His Holy Spirit, to keep on our guard, then we shall still be ready when the storm comes. Praise be to His mercy for all the blessings of this life, and still more for the means of grace and the hope of glory.

32. ¶ And it came to pass, as Peter passed throughout all quarters, he came down also to the saints which dwelt at Lydda.

S. Peter made good use of this time of tranquillity. Now he was able to move about fearlessly, he could gather together Christ's soldiers and see how they had fared under trial, and could encourage them to resist manfully when they had to stand fire again. He was never slothful when any work for his Lord could be done; instead of his own ease Christ's glory was his chief thought.

33. And there he found a certain man named Aeneas, which had kept his bed eight years, and was sick of the palsy. 34. And Peter said unto him, Aeneas, Jesus Christ maketh thee whole: arise, and make thy bed. And he arose immediately.

This is the extension of Christ's own healing work; it was not the apostle, but the power and mercy of Christ the Lord invisibly present that wrought this cure. He Who had a short while before moved visibly through that country, bringing healing with Him, was now invisibly present in His Holy Church, and the same marvels of love betokened His presence.

35. And all that dwelt at Lydda and Saron saw him, and turned to the Lord.

Would God we could see more persons turning to the Lord! This saving change does not consist in noisy demonstrations nor loud professions of assurance. God does not require excitement or anything unreal or exaggerated. His ways are often very quiet and unseen, yet there must be a turning. The world's road and Christ's road are not the same, if we would follow the one we must have left the other. Lord, multiply among us, not outward professions so much as inward submissions of heart to Thy Divine love.

36. ¶ Now there was at Joppa a certain disciple named Tabitha, which by interpretation is called Dorcas: this woman was full of good works and almsdeeds which she did.

A full life is better than an empty one. Some lives are full only of talk or vanity, but here is one full of good works. This Christian woman, whatever her calling in life was, yet made time for abundant good deeds; she did not merely give her money, but her own time and labour, which are better still. She represents those many Christian women since that time who have given themselves up to help distress. God allows trouble in the world on purpose to awaken love to relieve it.

37. And it came to pass in those days, that she was sick, and died: whom when they had washed, they laid her in an upper chamber.

Death comes to the merciful as to the unmerciful, yet the deathbed of the former is soothed by love and prayers. Their good works remain with them while they live, and follow them when they die. They leave behind a bright example that encourages those who remain behind. They approach God's judgment-seat accompanied by prayers. Indeed they are gone, but yet they live to God; we and they are still linked together.

38. And forasmuch as Lydda was nigh to Joppa, and the disciples had heard that Peter was there, they sent unto him two men, desiring him that he would not delay to come to them.

S. Peter willingly made himself the servant of all. He held that Christians should be always at their brethren's service for any kindness. He remembered his Master's great condescension, how ready He had been to succour the lowliest soul. It would be a woful mistake if Christian bishops or priests took a lordly air and thought themselves above their brethren.

39. Then Peter arose and went with them. When he was come, they brought him into the upper chamber: and all the widows stood by him weeping, and shewing the coats and garments which Dorcas made, while she was with them.

It is delightful to see how grateful these poor people were to their kind friend who was gone. I wish I had more of this same virtue. I so readily receive gifts or favours, but am so cold about repaying them with any true love in return. I have had many presents, and soon forgotten all the love that offered them.

40. But Peter put them all forth, and kneeled down, and prayed; and turning him to the body said, Tabitha, arise. And she opened her eyes: and when she saw Peter, she sat up.

41. And he gave her his hand, and lifted her up, and when he had called the saints and widows, presented her alive.

I always read with great awe such accounts as these of some person having returned from the other world. I marvel what they had to tell their friends of their experience, how they lived henceforward, how they approached death for the second time. God was pleased to work thus in order to show the power of prayer, and to prove His Presence with His Church, and because He had still some more good deeds for these holy souls to do. I shall have to die only once, but that is quite enough for me.

42. And it was known throughout all Joppa; and many believed in the Lord. 43. And it came to pass, that he tarried many days in Joppa with one Simon a tanner.

The prince of the apostles lodged with plain people. His great authority in Christ's Church did not introduce him to palaces, yet the Church was never more glorious, more fruitful, more spiritual, than in those days. That is the Church's real glory, to live by faith, not to enjoy great riches or titles. The Lord may very easily take away dignities and riches, and give us much better possessions instead.

CHAPTER X.

1. Cornelius, a devout man, 5. being commanded by an angel, sendeth for Peter: 11. who by a vision 15, 20. is taught not to despise the Gentiles. 34. As he preacheth Christ to Cornelius and his company, 44. the Holy Ghost falleth on them, 48. and they are baptized.

THREE was a certain man in Cæsarea called Cornelius, a centurion of the band called the Italian band, 2. a devout man, and one that feared God with all his house, which gave much alms to the people, and prayed to God always.

How much Cornelius had learnt already! He was a heathen and a soldier, set amidst daily temptations, having round him examples of ungodliness, yet he had learnt to worship the true God, to spread the same faith among his household, to cherish God's despised people, to pray frequently and regularly. Many of us who have been brought up in the full light of the Gospel fall far behind him. God's grace was now leading him on to still greater heights of faith, and hope, and love.

3. He saw in a vision evidently about the ninth hour of the day an angel of God coming in to him, and saying unto him, Cornelius.

Are my thoughts such that I could welcome a heavenly messenger suddenly appearing? Alas! foolish, and filthy, and idle dreams, wandering prayers, lazy slothful days, will not draw any angel down to share in them. I wish I could recall myself to reverence by thinking of God's unseen hosts. They are near, they behold me, they find me a very unworthy fellow-servant.

4. And when he looked on him, he was afraid, and said, What is it, Lord? And he said unto him, Thy prayers and thine alms are come up for a memorial before God.

Many prayers and alms are like lead, they fall down and never mount up at all; but those of Cornelius had wings. God had put into his heart the will to perform them. He blessed and accepted them. He let them approach His throne together. Lord, help me to improve in both these two points. I need a more devout heart and more liberal hand, and do Thou unite my devotions to the all-perfect offering of Thy dear Son.

5. And now send men to Joppa, and call for one Simon, whose surname is Peter: 6. he lodgeth with one Simon a tanner, whose house is by the sea side: he shall tell thee what thou oughtest to do.

What, he still needed more light! Was it not enough for him to be pious, charitable, obedient? No, he still was outside the Church of Christ. Christian ministers, Christian sacraments, the saving Death of Christ, were unknown to him. He missed the fount of blessing while he remained as he was. There are some in these days who rest content with leading a good life, and do not care to love and worship Christ Jesus. They are bidden by this message to inquire further into God's counsels for them.

7. And when the angel which spake unto Cornelius was departed, he called two of his household servants, and a devout soldier of them that waited on him continually;

It is pleasant to think of Cornelius gathering about him a little Church of believers in the true God. These were not Jews, still less as yet Christians, but they rejoiced to learn about the one true and living God, to make prayers and lead an upright life in common. How much masters and superiors in these days need to practise the same care for those under them! Those above and those beneath are both alike God's creatures, redeemed by Christ's Blood, heirs of heaven. Have they no common ties and feelings?

8. And when he had declared all these things unto them, he sent them to Joppa.

I do not suppose the servants or the soldier did their duty the worse because their master and commander had told them of this heavenly vision. What delight Cornelius must have felt in the

assurance from above that God cared for him ! He had before groped in the dark, but now he knew of a heavenly Friend Who welcomed all his efforts, and had new revelations for him.

9. ¶ *On the morrow, as they went on their journey, and drew nigh unto the city, Peter went up upon the housetop to pray about the sixth hour :*

If Peter had forgotten his midday prayer that day, would he not have missed the vision and Divine call ? Let us take care not to omit our prayers lightly. Our seasons of communion with God should be reverently kept to, if we are at all able to observe them. How many temptations, how many downfalls have been avoided by the time for prayer coming round ! God's Spirit has had a chance with us then, holy thoughts have resumed their power.

10. *And he became very hungry, and would have eaten : but while they made ready, he fell into a trance,*

S. Peter was on the housetop, looking over sea and sky, while strange sights unrolled themselves before him and a strange voice sounded in his ears ; and meanwhile down below in the kitchen his dinner was getting ready. Yet each was doing his proper work, he in learning from God how to extend the faith, and the cook in preparing what he was to eat. God has His several positions and duties. His kingdom goes on by each doing his own business well.

11. *And saw heaven opened, and a certain vessel descending unto him, as it had been a great sheet knit at the four corners, and let down to the earth : 12. wherein were all manner of fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air. 13. And there came a voice to him, Rise, Peter ; kill, and eat.*

This vision signified that all men were fit to be made Christians. Not only was the Gospel meant for Jewish believers, but for all men throughout the world, however idolatrous, or degraded, or ignorant they might be. Their rough and wild condition is represented by the strange, fierce, or shy creatures that seemed to sport before the apostle's eyes. He was bidden not literally to kill them, but to slay what was evil in them and join them to the body of Christ's holy Church. He must not turn away from any soul as too loathsome or too savage. Why, they are all God's creatures and bought by Christ's Blood.

14. *But Peter said, Not so, Lord ; for I have never eaten any thing that is common or unclean.*

At first he took the command to speak of literal eating. No, he had always kept the law and avoided all food that was forbidden by it. His faithfulness in this matter rebukes our carelessness in avoiding

sin. The Jews were most careful lest anything forbidden should pass their lips. Should we lightly allow unclean thoughts to dwell in our mind, unclean words on our tongues? It is wise to be always on our guard lest evil enter.

15. And the voice spake unto him again the second time, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common. 16. This was done thrice: and the vessel was received up again into heaven.

Thrice came the heavenly message telling him of God's cleansing grace. All men are now purified, Christ's Death has bought them, His Spirit pleads with them. Why are we so ready to exclude our brethren from God's mercy, why do we treat harshly those who are beneath us in learning or position? If God has been pleased to work such great things for man's redemption, is not the whole earth transfigured thereby?

17. Now while Peter doubted in himself what this vision which he had seen should mean, behold, the men which were sent from Cornelius had made enquiry for Simon's house, and stood before the gate, 18. and called, and asked whether Simon, which was surnamed Peter, were lodged there. 19. ¶ While Peter thought on the vision, the Spirit said unto him, Behold, three men seek thee. 20. Arise therefore, and get thee down, and go with them, doubting nothing: for I have sent them.

S. Peter understood that God required some new undertaking from him; yet he knew not what. He pondered over the vision, wondering what his duty might be, and as he pondered, God taught him further. Such are the ways of God's Spirit, not showing us all at once, but gradually making plain His designs to such as patiently seek for light. Let me with humble confidence seek to know His will, and then act upon it as far as it is made plain. God sends us messengers in our brethren, in the common events of life, in books we read or words we hear. He requires of us an obedient heart to do His business.

21. Then Peter went down to the men which were sent unto him from Cornelius; and said, Behold, I am he whom ye seek: what is the cause wherefore ye are come?

How wonderfully the two visions fitted to each other, that of Cornelius and that of S. Peter! God showed that they were no mere fancies by directing at the same time Cornelius to search for S. Peter, and S. Peter to search what this new task of his was to be. He was seeking for a work to do for God, these heathens were seeking for him to do it. Each must have been much confirmed in his new undertaking by finding that the other party knew something of it already.

22. And they said, Cornelius the centurion, a just man, and one that feareth God, and of good report among all the nation of the Jews, was warned from God by an holy angel to send for thee into his house, and to hear words of thee.

If God was pleased to send an angel from heaven only to bid Cornelius hearken to Christian ministers, and receive Christian baptism, should not we listen reverently to the message that preachers of the Gospel utter now? They tell us truths which angels cannot bring. Let us pray that God's message on their lips may be fruitful. No one will get good from them who hears in a captious scoffing spirit. It is easy to say they are but frail men, yet God's Spirit employs their means to tell us our duty.

23. Then called he them in, and lodged them. And on the morrow Peter went away with them, and certain brethren from Joppa accompanied him.

No doubt S. Peter thought and prayed much over his new call. While his guests rested after their long journey, he was considering God's dealings. No doubt he reflected on the words of Christ Himself, on all the saving mercies of the Gospel, and last of all on this great vision he had just had; and so he came to realize that the time was now come to make heathens into Christians, and put aside the requirements of the law. It was a great step to take in those days, and only a very faithful and earnest Christian could have taken it.

24. And the morrow after they entered into Caesarea. And Cornelius waited for them, and had called together his kinsmen and near friends.

Caesarea was accustomed to see the Roman procurator enter with his guards. Great princes and generals came there; grand reviews of the soldiers took place there. These few Jews and servants walking along the dusty road made a very poor entry compared to those grand spectacles, but to the eye of faith this was far the greater event. Here was Divine mercy stretching out its arms to welcome the Gentile world.

25. And as Peter was coming in, Cornelius met him, and fell down at his feet, and worshipped him. 26. But Peter took him up, saying, Stand up; I myself also am a man.

Those whom God's Providence has set in high places should frequently repeat this saying to themselves. They are also men, as frail, as unworthy, as liable to sorrow and death as their brethren. They are compassed with infirmity. And we others, who have no need to be reminded of our nothingness, may still be on our guard against flattery. If nobody tries literally to worship us, yet fools and knaves are apt to praise us up and burn the incense of foolish praise before the altar of our conceit.

27. And as he talked with him, he went in, and found many that were come together. 28. And he said unto them, Ye know how that it is an unlawful thing for a man that is a Jew to keep company, or come unto one of another nation; but God hath shewed me that I should not call any man common or unclean. 29. Therefore came I unto you without gainsaying, as soon as I was sent for: I ask therefore for what intent ye have sent for me?

What a tremendous barrier there was between Jew and Gentile! It needed heavenly visions, and long disputings, and many years of Christian experience before it could be wholly broken down, before Jews and Gentiles joined together peacefully at God's altar as members of His one Church. Here we see the first of the apostles venturing boldly on this new path. He is letting down his net to catch souls, as his Master had foretold.

30. And Cornelius said, Four days ago I was fasting until this hour; and at the ninth hour I prayed in my house, and, behold, a man stood before me in bright clothing, 31. and said, Cornelius, thy prayer is heard, and thine alms are had in remembrance in the sight of God. 32. Send therefore to Joppa, and call hither Simon, whose surname is Peter; he is lodged in the house of one Simon a tanner by the sea side: who, when he cometh, shall speak unto thee.

That afternoon he had

“Knelt alone,
Nor dreamed his prayers and tears
Would help a world undone.”

His leisure time was employed in prayer to God and in alms to the needy. He sought God earnestly, and so he won a far greater light and blessing than he had dreamt of. Yet do not think the good that there was in Cornelius was his own. No, it came of that merciful Saviour Whom he was seeking though he knew Him not. Those good thoughts and good works were suggested to him by redeeming love.

33. Immediately therefore I sent to thee; and thou hast well done that thou art come. Now therefore are we all here present before God, to hear all things that are commanded thee of God.

Cornelius' friends and household shared his faith. He had not kept back from them what light he had. They, too, had become accustomed to pray, to do good, to keep from evil; they all now shared in that wondering submission with which he awaited the Gospel. If we came to church with such a desire to learn, we should carry away with us more good than we generally do.

34. ¶ Then Peter opened his mouth, and said, Of a truth I

perceive that God is no respecter of persons : 35. but in every nation he that feareth him, and worketh righteousness, is accepted with him.

God looks not at our country or our colour. Poor men are as dear to Him as the rich and great. He sees in us souls made in His image and bought by Christ's Blood. What He would have in us is faith and duty. Those who adore His holy Name and strive to keep His law are dear to Him, whatever they are reckoned in man's sight. This was a great lesson which was imprinted on S. Peter's heart by the Holy Spirit at this time, the lesson that Gentiles were as fit as Jews to receive the message of salvation. God made no difference between them.

36. The word which God sent unto the children of Israel, preaching peace by Jesus Christ : (he is Lord of all.)

Our Lord Jesus Christ was the first Evangelist. He preached the Gospel before it was written or read, and His message was one of peace ; peace between God and man by the offer of pardon, and peace between man and man by teaching that all men were brethren in Him. He worked among the Jews Himself, but He is all men's Lord. His life, and death, and grace are the inheritance of all mankind.

37. That word, I say, ye know, which was published throughout all Judaea, and began from Galilee, after the baptism which John preached ;

John Baptist was the link between the Old Testament and the New. He spoke of repentance, and turned men's hearts towards God. Those Galileans who had been taught by him became our Lord's first disciples. Such was the first beginning of the Gospel, but who shall say where it will end ? Earth and heaven will be full of it for ever. Nothing can come in its place.

38. How God anointed Jesus of Nazareth with the Holy Ghost and with power : who went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil ; for God was with him.

Oh holy and perfect life, a pattern to all our lives ; short indeed in span, and confined in one small country, but full of loving compassion, and holiness, and wisdom ; a life devoted to breaking down the power of evil and setting up God's kingdom. The sacred humanity of Christ was united to Godhead and filled with the gifts of the Holy Spirit. It showed us of what perfection our weak nature was capable. If one Man has been thus, should we not rise higher and be better than we are ?

39. And we are witnesses of all things which he did both in the land of the Jews, and in Jerusalem ; whom they slew and hanged on a tree :

This was the end of Christ's earthly mission, so far as the world's eyes could see, a death of shame. Our Lord went by this rough road. He did not disdain to bear the malefactor's cross and die upon it. We must not hide this side of the Gospel. Those who embrace it must prepare themselves to drink the same bitter cup which their Master tasted. All His healing mercies and mighty marvels could not save Him from this, and shall we expect to be always prosperous?

40. Him God raised up the third day, and shewed him openly; 41. not to all the people, but unto witnesses chosen before of God, even to us, who did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead.

Christ's Resurrection was proved by many tokens, by many visions; it was gradually brought home by the strongest evidence to His friends' doubting hearts. They became His witnesses to all the world, because they had known Him all through. Lord, grant that Thy witnesses in these days may speak with confidence of Thee. Let them know Thy saving Presence, and so be able to tell of Thee to the world.

42. And he commanded us to preach unto the people, and to testify that it is he which was ordained of God to be the Judge of quick and dead.

Here is the message of judgment. We shall have to give account for our faith and for our life to Christ glorified. He will sit on His judgment-throne in the great inconceivable day when all our character shall be tried. When I think of that awful day my heart fails. I have no righteousness that will stand. This comes first, feel your own misery, your own vileness, the approach of God's awful judgment.

43. To him give all the prophets witness, that through his name whosoever believeth in him shall receive remission of sins.

Here is the message of mercy. No sins of ours can exhaust the virtue of Christ's Sacrifice. Let us only believe, and pray, and the fountain will be opened to us that is able to wash away all our guilt. Scripture is full of the thought of atonement. It tells how man can become acceptable with God, what can avail to blot out sin. All its types, and longings, and foreshadowings pointed to the Saving Victim Who opens heaven's gates to us. As the thought of judgment makes me fear, so the thought of Divine mercy gives me comfort and hope.

44. ¶ While Peter yet spake these words, the Holy Ghost fell on all them which heard the word. 45. And they of the circumcision which believed were astonished, as many as came with

Peter, because that on the Gentiles also was poured out the gift of the Holy Ghost.

They had doubted whether any uncircumcised Gentiles were fit to receive Christian baptism, and, behold, God had Himself taken possession of their hearts. They showed evident signs of the Spirit's presence. Gentiles as well as Jews were praising God and confessing Christian faith. They were not yet baptized, but they were Christians in faith and behaviour. Here was a proof which sincere believers could not help recognising.

46. For they heard them speak with tongues, and magnify God. Then answered Peter, 47. Can any man forbid water, that these should not be baptized, which have received the Holy Ghost as well as we? 48. And he commanded them to be baptized in the name of the Lord. Then prayed they him to tarry certain days.

Though an angel, and an apostle, and the Holy Spirit Himself had enlightened their souls, yet they were not to dispense with holy Baptism, which is the ordinary entrance on the Christian covenant. It is not a proof of high spirituality to dispense with sacraments, but rather a piece of neglect and unbelief. If God is pleased to appoint certain outward rites to bring home unseen gifts to us, it is our wisdom humbly to use them. We shall find profit in coming, as other Christians do, to find God in His holy ordinances. Those who despise forms are seldom the persons who know most of the Spirit's teaching.

CHAPTER XI.

1. Peter, being accused for going in to the Gentiles, 5. maketh his defence, 18. which is accepted. 19. The gospel being spread into Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, Barnabas is sent to confirm them. 26. The disciples there are first called Christians. 27. They send relief to the brethren in Judea in time of famine.

AND the apostles and brethren that were in Judaea heard that the Gentiles had also received the word of God.

What great consequences had come of Cornelius' solitary prayer, and S. Peter's midday prayer on the housetop! All the world was soon full of the news that salvation had come to Gentiles also. Cornelius was our leader on the heavenly road. All we Gentiles are marching after him towards heaven. There is no more need to look for God's Presence in the Jewish temple, for the whole earth is made fit for His worship.

2. And when Peter was come up to Jerusalem, they that were of the circumcision contended with him, 3. saying, Thou wentest in to men uncircumcised, and didst eat with them.

Yet there was no direct law of God against this; only it was the Jewish custom, which they regarded as binding. They were so afraid of defilement that they regarded heathens as altogether unclean and unfit for Jewish society. They were like many nowadays who look down on their poorer and more ignorant brethren. It would widen our sympathies to remember that God made and Christ redeemed all mankind alike.

4. But Peter rehearsed the matter from the beginning, and expounded it by order unto them, saying,

With much patience and humility, not standing on his rights as the first of the apostles, but rendering an account of his conduct, as if the Jewish Christians had been his masters. He had himself needed the enlightenment of the vision, he had himself been taught by God, been rescued by His mercy, upheld by His grace. All this kept him from despising or blaming his brethren's scruples.

5. I was in the city of Joppa praying: and in a trance I saw a vision, A certain vessel descend, as it had been a great sheet, let down from heaven by four corners; and it came even to me: 6. upon the which when I had fastened mine eyes, I considered, and saw fourfooted beasts of the earth, and wild beasts, and creeping things, and fowls of the air.

Heathens were represented as wild beasts in the vision, stalking about in pride, or tearing each other in cruelty, or creeping like serpents deceitfully, or flying up to the sky in empty questionings. They had lost the hearts of men, and so appeared in the shape of wild creatures. Let Christians, who are new made in Christ's image, beware lest evil affections turn them into beasts again. That would be a sad transformation, all for the worse, out of men into brutes.

7. And I heard a voice saying unto me, Arise, Peter; slay and eat.

What, kill and taste of these strange creatures! Yes, kill the brute in them, and join them to the body of Christ's Church. Holiness instead of vice, obedience instead of pride, self-denial instead of self-pleasing,—this would be the death they would have to undergo. They would now, by the apostles' ministry, become new creatures, inwardly knit to Christ, and to other believers.

8. But I said, Not so, Lord: for nothing common or unclean hath at any time entered into my mouth. 9. But the voice

anointed me again from heaven, What God hath cleansed, that call not thou common.

What the mouth was to a Jew, the heart is to a Christian. Nothing unclean should enter there. We should be careful, as the Jews were, to consider what God allows us, what is acceptable to Him. His grace has taken away the restrictions formerly placed on this or that food, the difference formerly existing between this or that people ; but we know well there are some things that He abhors, and would have us abhor too.

10. *And this was done three times : and all were drawn up again into heaven.*

The voice came thrice, and the vision disappeared slowly as it had come, all in order to confirm S. Peter's faith. So great a matter as the fitness of us Gentiles for conversion was worth making plain. The figure three is often used in Scripture, and appears in nature, as if to recall to our minds the Being of Almighty God, where we reverently acknowledge His awful unity, and yet worship Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, Three Persons yet one God.

11. *And, behold, immediately there were three men already come unto the house where I was, sent from Cæsarea unto me.*

12. *And the spirit bade me go with them, nothing doubting. Moreover these six brethren accompanied me, and we entered into the man's house :*

S. Peter went to work very discreetly and patiently in this great matter. He did not trust wholly to his own feelings or visions, but welcomed the messengers, shared their news with his brethren, asked them to come with him. How different is this from the independent way in which I often rely on my own opinion, and look down contemptuously on other men and their judgment ! Let me aim at both together, being firm to God's commands, and yet humble in preferring others' judgment to my own.

13. *And he shewed us how he had seen an angel in his house, which stood and said unto him, Send men to Joppa, and call for Simon, whose surname is Peter ; 14. who shall tell thee words, whereby thou and all thy house shall be saved.*

Words are sometimes the source of death, they poison the mind with unbelief or sin, they convey corruption. And yet, thank God, they are often the source of life. S. Peter's words were words that brought salvation ; they revealed a Saviour, they spoke of faith and duty, they laid out the path to heaven. Lord, let our words be of this latter kind, words that may save our hearers.

15. *And as I began to speak, the Holy Ghost fell on them, as on us at the beginning. 16. Then remembered I the word*

of the Lord, how that he said, John indeed baptized with water; but ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost.

This was the Gentile Pentecost, as the Jewish believers had had theirs ten days after Christ's Ascension. The outward signs figured the presence of the Holy Spirit, Who came to take up His abode in these hearts. Our Lord's words about Baptism by the Holy Spirit were not only for the apostles; all Christians have a share in them. All may enjoy that peace, and light, and power which the Holy Spirit brings.

17. *Forasmuch then as God gave them the like gift as he did unto us, who believed on the Lord Jesus Christ; what was I, that I could withstand God?*

We should look out for the signs of God's will. He manifests it wonderfully to those who look out for it. We get only ruin by resisting Him. His work may be seen going on in a nation, in a Church, in single souls. Our joy should be to range ourselves on His side, and forward, not hinder, His gracious purposes.

18. *When they heard these things, they held their peace, and glorified God, saying, Then hath God also to the Gentiles granted repentance unto life.*

Yet the Jewish Christians needed to learn again and again this same lesson. We shall see in chapters xv. and xxi. how it was still a difficulty for them. The gate of true repentance was now thrown open to the Gentiles, a repentance which seemed like death at first, dying to their old ways with pain and hard struggle, and yet it turned into life, by the pardon, and the strength, and hope [it brought]. It led through death to life.

19. ¶ *Now they which were scattered abroad upon the persecution that arose about Stephen travelled as far as Phenice, and Cyprus, and Antioch, preaching the word to none but unto the Jews only.* 20. *And some of them were men of Cyprus and Cyrene, which, when they were come to Antioch, spake unto the Grecians, preaching the Lord Jesus.* 21. *And the hand of the Lord was with them: and a great number believed, and turned unto the Lord.*

Antioch ranked as the third city in the world. It was far larger and more populous than Jerusalem. This was the second great city where the Gospel was planted, and it became a centre of Christian work for many centuries. Its evangelists were despised Jews, outcasts from home, flying for their lives, men destitute of any outward helps. Yet they brought news of salvation to this great and wealthy place. Jews and Greeks alike gave up their prejudices and pressed into the Church. After all, what is it but God's sovereign grace that does all this? It is not man's eloquence or

power, but Divine, all-converting grace. God's unseen hand guides and disposes men's hearts.

22. ¶ Then tidings of these things came unto the ears of the church which was in Jerusalem: and they sent forth Barnabas, that he should go as far as Antioch.

Why was this? Perhaps they feared lest the Church of Antioch should be in opposition to the Church at Jerusalem. No doubt great care was needed to make believers in new centres of faith walk in union with older Christians. There was as yet no New Testament, no written Liturgy, few traditions and customs settled among believers. All that had come was repentance, and faith, and admission to Christian privileges by holy Baptism. God was then setting up the great fabric of the Catholic Church, under whose shadow we are happy to live. Let us never rend it nor leave it.

23. Who, when he came, and had seen the grace of God, was glad, and exhorted them all, that with purpose of heart they would cleave unto the Lord. 24. For he was a good man, and full of the Holy Ghost and of faith: and much people was added unto the Lord.

S. Barnabas was not jealous, though this work was wrought by other hands than his, and among new people, and in new ways. No, he was delighted to see such faith, though not of his own planting. All he did was to exhort those Christians to perseverance. Conversion is one thing, but, alas! it does not always issue in cleaving steadfastly to the Lord. A humble, watchful, prayerful walk is still needed. Warm feelings die away and rough days come. It would be a great mistake to think that all was done and over when we have begun to be Christians. I am sure some preachers forget this; they preach conversion, and forget to add the rest.

25. Then departed Barnabas to Tarsus, for to seek Saul: 26. and when he had found him, he brought him unto Antioch. And it came to pass, that a whole year they assembled themselves with the church, and taught much people. And the disciples were called Christians first in Antioch.

A new apostle, a new Church, and a new name. Here we see the faith beginning to spread and grow as the Lord had foretold. While remaining the same, it caught new hearts, revealed new depths, enlisted new helpers every day. This name of Christians was one of scorn on heathen lips, but believers themselves soon delighted in using it. It spoke to them of Christ, the Anointed King, in Whose graces and gifts all believers share, Whom they own as their Master. God grant our behaviour may not disgrace this dear Lord Who has bought us to be His.

27. ¶ And in these days came prophets from Jerusalem unto Antioch.

What drew these prophets there? Perhaps God had revealed to them that Antioch and not Jerusalem would now be the centre of Christian life, and that the Gentiles were about to flock into the Church in large numbers. Perhaps it was merely that they delighted to witness the operations of God's grace. They represent to us the Divine guidance and blessing which was now slowly but surely passing away from the Jews and beginning to abide with the Gentiles.

28. And there stood up one of them named Agabus, and signified by the spirit that there should be great dearth throughout all the world: which came to pass in the days of Claudius Cæsar.

God sometimes reveals His coming judgments that we may prepare for them and turn them away as far as may be. He wakes us up from our slumbers and shows us some great affliction ready to overwhelm us. This was a great scarcity, caused by bad seasons. Sometimes the trouble is sickness, sometimes war. All these sad and grievous events are in the hands of Divine Providence, which orders them for wise ends beyond our discernment.

29. Then the disciples, every man according to his ability, determined to send relief unto the brethren which dwelt in Judea: 30. which also they did, and sent it to the elders by the hands of Barnabas and Saul.

These new Christians had learnt the lesson of love; they thought of their brethren the Jewish Christians, who were very poor, and beginning to be reckoned as outcasts by their own countrymen. Though Gentiles themselves, yet the tie of faith seemed more to them than that of blood; they stretched out their hands to bridge over the great gulf that had kept Jew and Gentile apart so long. The apostles did not think it beneath their dignity to administer these alms; they had learnt from their Divine Master to have compassion on the needy.

CHAPTER XII.

1. King Herod persecuteth the Christians, killeth James, and imprisoneth Peter; whom an angel delivereth upon the prayers of the church.
20. In his pride taking to himself the honour due to God, he is stricken by an angel, and dieth miserably. 24. After his death, the word of God prospereth.

NOW about that time Herod the king stretched forth his hands to vex certain of the church.

God intrusts a portion of His power to the hands of this world's rulers. They are appointed by Him to administer justice. They are to reward the good and punish the wicked. It is a great task that their Lord commits to them. But, alas, how often they have profaned it by their neglect! They have lived in sin, have rewarded vile persons, have persecuted the righteous, have turned God's fair world upside down. How much better off are we who hold a humble place and are not subject to the temptations which beset a throne!

2. And he killed James the brother of John with the sword.

Ah, now the words were made good which the Lord Jesus had spoken to James. He did indeed drink of his Master's cup and endured His baptism. Yet this was all in preparation for his sitting by the Lord in His kingdom. The remembrance of the wonderful scenes at which he had been a partaker must have helped him when he came to die. There was the Glory and the Agony, and many occasions of his Master's love and power. Lord, when our hour comes may we also look backward on Thy mercies and forward to Thy heavenly promises.

3. And because he saw it pleased the Jews, he proceeded further to take Peter also. (Then were the days of unleavened bread.) 4. And when he had apprehended him, he put him in prison, and delivered him to four quaternions of soldiers to keep him; intending after Easter to bring him forth to the people.

This King Herod was grandson to the old King Herod who put the innocents to death, and nephew to Herod the Tetrarch who had killed S. John Baptist. The Roman Emperor had just given him all his grandfather's dominions. All that we hear of him in Scripture is the account of his persecuting Christians, how all his schemes were foiled, how his pride and splendour came to a shocking and sudden end. He set himself against God, and so failed miserably. Let our plan be to please God and do right, careless whether we please men or not. Those only will prosper at last who have been God's true servants.

5. Peter therefore was kept in prison: but prayer was made without ceasing of the church unto God for him.

These persons believed in prayer. They did not reckon that the case was hopeless, though Peter was chained, and imprisoned, and his approaching execution announced. They pleaded with God the great need they had of the apostle, our Saviour's many promises to him, the deliverances God had wrought in old time. They kept on praying, as though they were wrestling with God and would really get the blessing if they persevered. Lord, I am ashamed of my own faithless, hopeless, formal intercessions when I read of these.

6. *And when Herod would have brought him forth, the same night Peter was sleeping between two soldiers, bound with two chains: and the keepers before the door kept the prison.*

Peter was asleep, in spite of the discomfort of his chains and the terror of approaching death. Perhaps his dreams went back to the Sea of Galilee and the gracious face and words of the Saviour of mankind. How blessed had S. Peter been in that close intercourse with our Lord! He must have remembered numberless beautiful and holy acts and words of which we know nothing. No threats could take away his faith now, or make him afraid or anxious, because he rested on God.

7. *And, behold, the angel of the Lord came upon him, and a light shined in the prison: and he smote Peter on the side, and raised him up, saying, Arise up quickly. And his chains fell off from his hands.*

So God's judgments wake up those who are sleeping in careless security. A light shines on the mind, a voice sounds in the ears, chains of evil habit fall from the hands. Those are happy who take advantage of the opportunity and rise with God's help to follow where He leads. Unless they rise quickly and fly, the devil will catch them again.

8. *And the angel said unto him, Gird thyself, and bind on thy sandals. And so he did. And he saith unto him, Cast thy garment about thee, and follow me.*

All was to be in order, all in place. The heavenly guide bade the prisoner dress himself and follow him. Just so Divine grace shows the converted soul what to do, how to live, which way to walk, clothes him with righteousness, leads him forth along the road to heaven. What a change from chains and captivity!

9. *And he went out, and followed him; and wist not that it was true which was done by the angel; but thought he saw a vision.*

It seemed too good to be true. Could the chains really be off and he himself free to move, with life, not death, in front of him? Only Divine help could have wrought this marvel. So we may say of conversion; it is not any human wisdom or influence, but the power of Divine grace laying hold on man's will. The hand of God is here.

10. *When they were past the first and the second ward, they came unto the iron gate that leadeth unto the city; which opened to them of his own accord: and they went out, and passed on through one street; and forthwith the angel departed from him.*

Still S. Peter seemed as in a dream : he passed two sentries, but they took no notice ; then he came to the great iron gate which was fast locked, but it opened silently as he and the angel drew near. Then he passed out into the streets of Jerusalem, and he looked round, and there he was alone and free. How many times has God dealt thus with souls, leading them safe through dangers and difficulties, restoring them past all hope ! He does not forsake us even when all seems darkest. He gives us guidance and strength from above.

11. And when Peter was come to himself, he said, Now I know of a surety, that the Lord hath sent his angel, and hath delivered me out of the hand of Herod, and from all the expectation of the people of the Jews.

Glory be to God for His great deliverances ! He can overcome all the power of man. As He rescued His saint once from chains and death, so He can deliver us from the power of sin, from the mockery of evil companions, from all downward influences. His grace is made perfect in our weakness. Let us only never give up trusting to Him. What is all the world when matched with Almighty Power ?

12. And when he had considered the thing, he came to the house of Mary the mother of John, whose surname was Mark ; where many were gathered together praying.

S. Peter desired first of all to relieve his friends' anxiety. He did not provide for his own safety before he brought them comfort. He knew they must be thinking of his great danger. O Lord, renew in us something of this spirit of living charity. How cold we are, how little concerned for the sufferings and dangers of our brethren ! We sleep peacefully or chat at our ease, while so many are in straits.

13. And as Peter knocked at the door of the gate, a damsel came to hearken, named Rhoda. 14. And when she knew Peter's voice, she opened not the gate for gladness, but ran in, and told how Peter stood before the gate.

Scripture preserves to us this maid's name, and tells us how watchful she was, how careful, how loving and grateful. Perhaps S. Peter had confirmed her, or given her Holy Communion. Anyhow she knew well how much depended on his life. She shared in all the anxiety of that night and the joy of the saint's escape. Many great kings and conquerors are forgotten while this girl's name is treasured for us.

15. And they said unto her, Thou art mad. But she constantly affirmed that it was even so. Then said they, It is his angel.

It could not be himself, they thought, but one of God's angels with news of him. The Jews commonly believed that every one has a guardian angel specially assigned by God to care for him ; whether this indeed be so or not, I do not certainly know, but I trust that angels watch over me, are grieved at my sins, rejoice at my repentance, are leading me towards that blessed place where I shall join with them in praising God for all His mercies.

16. But Peter continued knocking : and when they had opened the door, and saw him, they were astonished. 17. But he, beckoning unto them with the hand to hold their peace, declared unto them how the Lord had brought him out of the prison. And he said, Go shew these things unto James, and to the brethren. And he departed, and went into another place.

He took care to conceal himself from Herod. He knew that God could if He pleased deliver him a thousand times instead of once, and yet that He would have us use all needful means for our own safety. In spite of the angel's wonderful rescue of S. Peter, he had now to fly and hide himself ; and many years after he was again caught, and this time put to death, as our Saviour had foretold. Such are God's ways. He bids us follow where He calls, whether the way be smooth or rough.

18. Now as soon as it was day, there was no small stir among the soldiers, what was become of Peter.

The chains were there, the guards at their post, the doors locked and keys safe. No account could be given by any one of the prisoner's escape. Perhaps the soldiers had learnt who S. Peter was, and what he believed. In those long hours when he was chained to them, he may have told them much about salvation, and then they must have felt it was God's hand that wrought this. Some of them may have been Christians in heart and rejoiced at the marvel.

19. And when Herod had sought for him, and found him not, he examined the keepers, and commanded that they should be put to death. And he went down from Judaea to Cæsarea, and there abode.

This is like the children at Bethlehem who were killed by the old King Herod in the place of the infant Jesus. They were innocent, but fell when Christ was rescued. So these soldiers were not to blame, though the king put them to death in spite at S. Peter's escape. God did not interfere in either case. He let the king's cruelty have its full career. There is a time, not always in this world, when His justice punishes the real criminals. For a while injustice has its way.

20. ¶ And Herod was highly displeased with them of Tyre and Sidon : but they came with one accord to him, and, having

made Blastus the king's chamberlain their friend, desired peace; because their country was nourished by the king's country.

Herod's attention had been turned away from the Christians by his quarrel with Tyre and Sidon. Now the people of those countries felt the pressure of the famine which was approaching, and humbly entreated peace from the king that they might buy his corn. This reconciliation would have left him at leisure to oppress the Church of Christ yet more cruelly than before. But God's designs were otherwise. He overrules peace and war, wise men and great events of this world, so that His Church may be preserved and His elect made perfect.

21. And upon a set day Herod, arrayed in royal apparel, sat upon his throne, and made an oration unto them. 22. And the people gave a shout, saying, It is the voice of a god, and not of a man.

The very day that Herod chose to exhibit all his grandeur was the day that God's wisdom had designed to strike him down with a sudden blow. He thought he was a god enthroned gloriously, able to judge or to forgive, the object of humble prayers; but how soon he was undeceived! Alas! men are but men, however highly exalted. Kings and beggars are alike in their mortality, their weakness, their temptations and sorrows; it is an unwholesome thing to be so highly placed that we forget this.

23. And immediately the angel of the Lord smote him, because he gave not God the glory: and he was eaten of worms, and gave up the ghost.

King Nebuchadnezzar lost his mind through his pride, and became like a beast. God showed him that the gift of reason is His only to give or take away. King Herod lost his life for the same cause, God making plain that life and kingship are in His hands. Instead of royal glory, Herod had five days of pain and then a wretched end. Not all his flatterers, nor power, nor grandeur could save him from the stroke of God's angel.

24. ¶ But the word of God grew and multiplied.

Persecutors and their wickedness are gone in a moment, but God's truth lasts on, and wins new victories. S. Peter, who had been chained and about to be put to death, is free and turning many souls to Christ, while King Herod has become a loathsome corpse in his palace. God's Word is inexhaustible; the more we believe in it, the more depths, and graces, and Divine truths are found to be contained in it.

25. And Barnabas and Saul returned from Jerusalem, when they had fulfilled their ministry, and took with them John, whose surname was Mark.

S. Paul had many years' practice in administering alms. We notice in his Epistles what care and love he bestowed on this task. He did not reckon it unworthy of his high calling. If the Mark who accompanied him and S. Barnabas from Jerusalem was the same who wrote the Gospel, what things he must have had to tell those two apostles about our Saviour's ways and doings! S. Mark's Gospel is that one which most of all gives familiar touches and descriptions of our Lord's manner and way of life. The picture of Christ's gentleness and Christ pleasing not Himself which comes in S. Paul's letters, may be a remembrance of his talks with S. Mark.

CHAPTER XIII.

1. Paul and Barnabas are chosen to go to the Gentiles. 7. Of Sergius Paulus, and Elymas the sorcerer. 14. Paul preacheth at Antioch, that Jesus is Christ. 42. The Gentiles believe: 45. but the Jews gainsay and blaspheme: 46. whereupon they turn to the Gentiles. 48. As many as were ordained to life believed.

NOW there were in the church that was at Antioch certain prophets and teachers; as Barnabas, and Simeon that was called Niger, and Lucius of Cyrene, and Manaen, which had been brought up with Herod the tetrarch, and Saul.

These were prophets in declaring God's will, and teachers in instructing the people in their duty. Christian preaching has always both these elements in it. We prophesy still that God's Providence will bring about a just reward to each, that death and judgment are approaching, that Christ will surely return. And we teach how Christians should behave, and live, and use means of grace in the prospect of these great verities. May God open hearts to believe the prophecy and learn the lessons!

2. As they ministered to the Lord, and fasted, the Holy Ghost said, Separate me Barnabas and Saul for the work whereunto I have called them.

O Lord and Holy Spirit, we beseech Thee, still make known Thy Divine will as to who shall be Christian ministers. Put into their hearts an inward call, into their circumstances outward guidance, separate them from profane words and ways, let them take up Thy work as their life's business. How unhappy would those be who had entered on so great a task without any calling from above! What strength could they have amidst contradictions, what message to deliver amidst unbelievers?

3. And when they had fasted and prayed, and laid their hands on them, they sent them away.

Long ago the heavenly voice, and his own desires and his gifts, had designated S. Paul as the apostle of the Gentiles, and yet none the less he was to have the outward form of ordination to give him a solemn blessing through appointed means. God appoints for us the outward sign no less than the inward grace, and we should not pass by it. These two apostles were the force that set forth to convert the world, weak enough in themselves, but strong in the faith that they were sent by God.

4. ¶ So they, being sent forth by the Holy Ghost, departed unto Seleucia; and from thence they sailed to Cyprus. 5. And when they were at Salamis, they preached the word of God in the synagogues of the Jews: and they had also John to their minister.

The island of Cyprus was the first stage in this great missionary journey. We English know it well, because it has of late come into English hands to govern. God's Providence may make use of us to restore to the island something of its former peace and prosperity. Why did the apostles go there first of all? No doubt God's Spirit directed them, and made an opening for their ministry. It is a mystery hidden with Him why certain countries, certain towns, certain persons should have God's message offered to them rather than to others. Our part is to catch at the message when it comes.

6. And when they had gone through the isle unto Paphos, they found a certain sorcerer, a false prophet, a Jew, whose name was Bar-jesus:

This man pretended to declare God's will, and to work miracles, yet it was all trickery and for his own gain. He professed to have a new religion to reveal to men. He took advantage of the general unbelief that prevailed to persuade men to be his disciples. How shall we be on our guard against deceivers now? The right way is to study the miracles of mercy, the words of truth, the sufferings and glory, which appear in Jesus Christ. This will be our security against putting any one into His place.

7. Which was with the deputy of the country, Sergius Paulus, a prudent man; who called for Barnabas and Saul, and desired to hear the word of God.

Sergius Paulus longed for light. He had wisdom enough to see the falsehood of heathenism and the barrenness of mere Jewish ceremonies, and he did not find much help from the sorcerer; all his dignity and the affairs of his government could not fill up the need which he felt of some true knowledge of God. This is real prudence, to be in earnest to know God's will.

8. But Elymas the sorcerer (for so is his name by interpreta-

(tion) withheld them, seeking to turn away the deputy from the faith.

This fight for a soul often goes on. The devil's ministers on one side, and God's ministers on the other, supply arguments and entreaties this way and that. Lord, inspire Thy ministers with such fervour, such convincing truths, such love, that they may overcome the evil one, and lead off Thy children to freedom. I remember with sadness how many who once seemed to be in the right way have been caught and led away by sin.

9. *Then Saul, (who also is called Paul,) filled with the Holy Ghost, set his eyes on him, 10. and said, O full of all subtlety and all mischief, thou child of the devil, thou enemy of all righteousness, wilt thou not cease to pervert the right ways of the Lord?*

These are plain words, yet true. If St. Paul had spoken more softly he would not have given God's message. It is true that many evil advisers are just this, full of craft, loving evil, hating good, doing Satan's work. Lord give us discernment to see and to keep away from them. What fools we should be to take such for our friends !

11. *And now, behold, the hand of the Lord is upon thee, and thou shalt be blind, not seeing the sun for a season. And immediately there fell on him a mist and a darkness; and he went about seeking some to lead him by the hand.*

This blindness was a warning to Elymas of his own spiritual state, and a sign to the governor of God's judgment in this matter. It is far better to be warned even by heavy chastisements, than to be let dream on in our sins. If Elymas was moved by this sudden judgment to seek for guidance from God as well as for a hand to find his way, then he must have blest God for the darkness that brought him into light.

12. *Then the deputy, when he saw what was done, believed, being astonished at the doctrine of the Lord.*

This is one of the first of S. Paul's converts from among the heathen. God had fitted the apostle for this work by his many gifts and sympathies, his share of heathen learning, his power of winning hearts. Now his words, and afterwards his letters, began to enlighten heathen hearts with immense floods of light about the true God, and the atoning Death of Christ, and the power of Divine grace.

13. *Now when Paul and his company loosed from Paphos, they came to Perga in Pamphylia: and John departing from them returned to Jerusalem.*

Why did he go back? Asia Minor was a new country, full of strange languages, new people, unaccustomed perils, and his heart was at home. Perhaps he loved study and a life of prayer and retirement rather than the dangers of a missionary life. We who love our own ease so much must not be overhasty to condemn him. Only let us thank God that there have been brave soldiers of the Cross who have persevered. How otherwise could the world have been converted?

14. ¶ But when they departed from Perga, they came to Antioch in Pisidia, and went into the synagogue on the sabbath day, and sat down. 15. And after the reading of the law and the prophets the rulers of the synagogue sent unto them, saying, Ye men and brethren, if ye have any word of exhortation for the people, say on.

This was always S. Paul's plan. He went in every city to the Jews first, worshipped with them, preached to them, showed how their Scriptures pointed to the Lord Jesus. He did not cast away his own people or despair of their salvation, but wherever he went appealed to them first of all before he spoke to the Gentiles. What patience he must have had to meet time after time their contempt, their indifference, their anger at the universal redemption that he had to declare! How much we need this persevering diligent temper, that nothing can tire out! It is a great gift of God, and must be sought from Him in humble prayer.

16. Then Paul stood up, and beckoning with his hand said, Men of Israel, and ye that fear God, give audience.

This is his first-recorded sermon. When such a person comes forward, so wonderfully called, so wonderfully prepared and fitted for the work of an apostle, we will listen to his teaching and be among those hearers who profited. We shall find here much that reminds us of S. Stephen's speech in chap. vii. S. Paul had heard Stephen with abhorrence, but now God had brought him to use much the same arguments that Stephen had used. I remember that I despised or hated some truths in past days which now I have come to delight in.

17. The God of this people of Israel chose our fathers, and exalted the people when they dwelt as strangers in the land of Egypt, and with an high arm brought he them out of it.

Look at the progress of God's great plan. He in His mercy chose Israel to be His people, raised them from slaves to freemen, gave them a holy Law, showed them mercies and wonders. His design was to frame for Himself a Church which should preserve true religion and be ready to receive the Gospel. We share in these mercies. Our own faith and calling spring from them.

18. And about the time of forty years suffered he their manners in the wilderness.

Church history tells us of many downfalls. There have been long ages of corruption, grave faults, divisions, and strife. Yet God's plan never failed. His truth was still preserved, His praises still sung. Looking back on the journey of believers in past time, it seems like a wilderness. Yet God did not utterly forsake His people. He still brought manna from heaven and water from the rock.

19. And when he had destroyed seven nations in the land of Chanaan, he divided their land to them by lot.

He gave Canaan to the Jewish people for their home. To us He gives many things, blessings of this life and means of grace. We are children of God, and have power to overcome the wicked one, and to live a godly, righteous, and sober life. Yet we must not fix our hopes altogether on this world. All that there is here of peace and happiness is but a passing shadow of something better to be one day revealed.

20. And after that he gave unto them judges about the space of four hundred and fifty years, until Samuel the prophet.

What does the history of the Judges teach us? is it not the power of God to overcome sin? They were men raised up here and there, with a few followers and small means, when Israel was utterly oppressed by some mighty enemy; and they fought, trusting only in God's arm, and utterly overthrew the foe and delivered God's people. Are our sinful companions, our temptations and difficulties too much for us now? we must take up the sword of the Lord and of Gideon. God chooses the weak things of the world to confound the mighty.

21. And afterward they desired a king: and God gave unto them Saul the son of Cis, a man of the tribe of Benjamin, by the space of forty years.

The royalty of Israel was another step in the history. First there had been patriarchs, then judges, now there was a king, one too of S. Paul's own name and tribe. Saul was divinely chosen and appointed, yet we know how he ended by killing God's priests, and being possessed by an evil spirit. What a great danger it is for any one to be set in high place, unless he cherishes a humble spirit amidst his glory!

22. And when he had removed him, he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will.

Yet we read how David fell into a great sin; yes, but he never utterly lost his faith in God. He regarded himself as God's servant, ready to carry out His orders, to maintain His worship, to administer His law. That was his delight, to be the shepherd of God's people. Therefore it was that God brought him to repentance after his fall, afflicted him for his good, blotted out his sins.

23. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus:

We come at last to the Gospel. Prophets and kings all pointed the way to Christ. David's conquering royalty figured the peaceable, humble kingdom of his Descendant. Our Lord is the Son of David, and yet far more wonderful than David. He comes down from above, He brings salvation, He reigns for ever, His throne is over all creation.

24. When John had first preached before his coming the baptism of repentance to all the people of Israel.. 25. And as John fulfilled his course, he said, Whom think ye that I am? I am not he. But, behold, there cometh one after me, whose shoes of his feet I am not worthy to loose.

As the King approached, His servant went before to announce His drawing near. John Baptist prepared the way, got ready the palace, provided the banquet for the Divine King. This he did by making hard hearts soft, by stern warnings, by earnest exhortations. He disposed men to receive their Saviour and welcome Him; he desired to make himself nothing, and exalt Jesus only; his message was, "Not I, but Christ the Lord."

26. Men and brethren, children of the stock of Abraham, and whosoever among you feareth God, to you is the word of this salvation sent.

We who read this now have our part in the offer. God speaks to us. Salvation was not limited to the actual hearers of our Lord's words in Palestine; it began there, but has now, through His Risen Life, spread abroad over the whole world. How often it has been put before ourselves, and we have left it unheeded!

27. For they that dwell at Jerusalem, and their rulers, because they knew him not, nor yet the voices of the prophets which are read every sabbath day, they have fulfilled them in condemning him..

Let me, O Lord, fulfil the prophecies, not in resisting, but in obeying Thy gracious will. Let the promises of Holy Scripture, not its warnings, come true in my case. All the sufferings, the rejection, the Cross and shame of the Lord Jesus, were shadowed out in ancient prophecy; nothing that His murderers did to Him but

was foretold there. All the power and passion of men cannot go beyond what God has appointed.

28. And though they found no cause of death in him, yet desired they Pilate that he should be slain.

No cause of death in Himself, yet great cause if He is viewed as bearing all our sins. Our guilt, our misery, our longing for some worthy sacrifice, our fear of God's holiness and yet hope of His compassion, all the yearnings of our nature for pardon and life, found a voice in Jesus Christ. He underwent the Cross with all this on His heart.

29. And when they had fulfilled all that was written of him, they took him down from the tree, and laid him in a sepulchre.

" In death's dark vale I soon shall be,
But I will nothing fear.
Thy rod and staff shall comfort me ;
Thou hast Thyself been there."

30. But God raised him from the dead : 31. and he was seen many days of them which came up with him from Galilee to Jerusalem, who are his witnesses unto the people.

Here is God's great plan completed. All the intimations of prophecy, the long series of preparations, the holy Life and precious Death of Christ, all issue in this glorious reality, a Living Saviour. Here is One Who justifies, Who comforts, Who will assuredly glorify His people. Here is good news of great joy, that sin and death have been overcome. Shall not we in our day be witnesses to this great truth by our lips and in our lives?

32. And we declare unto you glad tidings, how that the promise which was made unto the fathers, 33. God hath fulfilled the same unto us their children, in that he hath raised up Jesus again ; as it is also written in the second psalm, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.

Christ's Resurrection is a new birth from the dead. Not only is He God's Son from eternity, and also born on earth as the Son of God from the Virgin's womb, but He had a third birth when He left our frail humble mortality and entered on His exalted state. Now He is declared as the Lord of mankind. His love and power are set forth for us to trust in.

34. And as concerning that he raised him up from the dead, now no more to return to corruption, he said on this wise, I will give you the sure mercies of David.

God intrusted to David's mind, put on David's lips, a store of precious thoughts about Christ's sufferings and glory. David in his hymns uttered more than he knew of. When he comforted his lonely

hours, or cheered his sorrows, or encouraged his devotions by a psalm, God was figuring therein many wonderful truths about our Saviour. The great truth that One Man should rise again never to die any more was shadowed out in many psalms of triumph.

35. Wherefore he saith also in another psalm, Thou shalt not suffer thine Holy One to see corruption.

Christ's Body saw no corruption, and became itself the seed of immortal life to our frail bodies. When we approach the Holy Table we discern there by faith that incorruptible Body of the Lord Jesus which can preserve both our bodies and souls to everlasting life. All holiness that we can have is by union with Christ. In ourselves is but corruption and death.

36. For David, after he had served his own generation by the will of God, fell on sleep, and was laid unto his fathers, and saw corruption: 37. but he, whom God raised again, saw no corruption.

Let us live after the pattern of David in our own day, and serve our generation as best we can. It is best to work hard and do all we can, for the night will soon be here. Only a few years, a few chances, a few friends are ours. Let us seize boldly on all chances of doing good, yet looking to our risen Saviour for strength. We must draw from Christ's Spirit supplies of strength for the present day.

38. ¶ Be it known unto you therefore, men and brethren, that through this man is preached unto you the forgiveness of sins:

This is good news for sinners, if they will see their own misery and avail themselves of this great offer of mercy. Sin is a blight, a stain on the soul, a grievous memory of past misdoings, a present bondage; how can we undo it, how get free from it? Christ the Lord reveals to us a great reconciliation. God has now pardoned and justified man, and sent him forth afresh with new life in his heart.

39. And by him all that believe are justified from all things, from which ye could not be justified by the law of Moses.

S. Paul had great things to say and write about justification. Here we find him giving just a glimpse of it. Moses' law spoke of defilement, and offered cleansing, and yet it was rather outward pollution, outward purification, that was meant. The deeper burdens of the heart found no sufficient atonement under the Law. Divine mercy now takes up all the legal figures of cleansing, all that nature could teach of remedy or compassion, and shows what they meant.

40. Beware therefore, lest that come upon you, which is spoken of in the prophets; 41. Behold, ye despisers, and won-

der, and perish: for I work a work in your days, a work which ye shall in no wise believe, though a man declare it unto you.

Let us not refuse to hearken to this grave voice of warning. God has expended mysteries, graces, providences, a whole series of wonders, both in the creation and redemption of the world and in our own individual life, yet it is in our power to close our ears against all His pleading. As Scripture foretells mercies, so it does judgments also. We cannot be like the heathen; our ears have heard, our eyes have witnessed God's dealings. If we fall back into the sleep of sin, one day there will be a terrible awakening for us.

42. *And when the Jews were gone out of the synagogue, the Gentiles besought that these words might be preached to them the next sabbath.*

Give us, Lord, a love for Thy Word, and grace to hear it with interest and attention. If we are not told more of S. Paul's sermon we can read in his Epistles what he used to say, and how he felt in beginning his great work for souls. Christ's love constrained him to speak, Christ's power and mercy supported him; he put aside himself and thought only of his Divine Master, and thus it was that his words took hold.

43. *Now when the congregation was broken up, many of the Jews and religious proselytes followed Paul and Barnabas: who, speaking to them, persuaded them to continue in the grace of God.*

It is not said that they gave them baptism at once; they bade them continue in their new faith which God's mercy had planted within; they spoke of the temptations and persecutions they would have to bear, and how they must strive for perseverance; they instructed them in their new duties, prayers, and hopes, and thus prepared them to be baptized.

44. ¶ *And the next sabbath day came almost the whole city together to hear the word of God.*

Is not this what our Saviour saw in Spirit when He sat by Jacob's well and spake of the fields being ready for harvest? God's Word has in it an infinite power and sweetness. Men's hearts are weak and in want, ready to welcome the Divine message. God grant us preachers who may so deliver His Word that men may delight to receive and obey it.

45. *But when the Jews saw the multitudes, they were filled with envy, and spake against those things which were spoken by Paul, contradicting and blaspheming.*

They could not bear that the Gentiles should press into their synagogue, share their privileges, have any part in their faith ; it was gall and wormwood to them to hear that the Messiah had come to pardon and teach all nations. No, they clung tightly to their old exclusiveness, and would sooner lose heaven themselves than let any one in along with them.

46. Then Paul and Barnabas waxed bold, and said, It was necessary that the word of God should first have been spoken to you : but seeing ye put it from you, and judge yourselves unworthy of everlasting life, lo, we turn to the Gentiles.

In one sense we are all unworthy of everlasting life, for all our deservings cannot earn it ; yet we must not disdain it as these Jews did, rather long for it, hope for it, adore God's great mercy that can make saints out of sinners, can fit such persons as we are for His glorious kingdom. In our day the offer is made to us ; let us not refuse to hear it, lest it be never again put within our reach.

47. For so hath the Lord commanded us, saying, I have set thee to be a light of the Gentiles, that thou shouldest be for salvation unto the ends of the earth.

The Lord Jesus is light for our minds, and salvation for our hearts. We could not bear light by itself unless grace came with it. All our learning needs this true light, all our striving this Divine grace, to be profitable. We live in a country that is far off, an age that is distant from the scenes of Scripture, yet God has not forgotten us. His mercy reaches even to us, and it is yet unspent.

48. And when the Gentiles heard this, they were glad, and glorified the word of the Lord : and as many as were ordained to eternal life believed.

O Lord, it is all of Thee. I acknowledge Thy mercy in having drawn me to believe, Thy power that has kept me from falling away, all the wealth of Thy promises. I tremble indeed when I see so many reject the Gospel, but I humbly trust that He Who has planted faith in my heart will maintain it there. I commit myself into His Divine hands for time and eternity.

49. And the word of the Lord was published throughout all the region.

The new converts were eager to share their treasure ; they did not keep it to themselves, but spread it abroad, and it grew larger and larger in the giving. Those who published God's Word found more and more depths of blessing in it, and those who received it became in turn desirous to convert their brethren. It was good news, tidings of light, grace, and comfort in a darkened world.

50. But the Jews stirred up the devout and honourable

women, and the chief men of the city, and raised persecution against Paul and Barnabas, and expelled them out of their coasts. 51. But they shook off the dust of their feet against them, and came unto Iconium.

As women have helped exceedingly, so they have at times hindered exceedingly the work of God. These devout ladies had embraced the Jewish faith, and therefore regarded the apostles as their enemies, and spared no pains to have them driven away; yet they did this in ignorance, for it is Christ's Gospel above all other doctrines that has raised women to a higher place, enlightened and cared for them, been their guide in all home duties. Women who had really come to love God would not long resist Jesus Christ.

52. And the disciples were filled with joy, and with the Holy Ghost.

Joy amidst persecutions, joy though their teachers were gone, joy though they seemed left to themselves just when they needed guidance most. God was their light, Jesus Christ their Friend and Helper, the Holy Ghost put courage in their hearts. What a great change now that the apostles had spoken to them! God grant that we may ourselves have a glimpse of such joy.

CHAPTER XIV.

1. Paul and Barnabas are persecuted from Iconium. 8. At Lystra Paul healeth a cripple, whereupon they are reputed as gods. 19. Paul is stoned. 21. They pass through divers churches, confirming the disciples in faith and patience. 26. Returning to Antioch, they report what God had done with them.

AND it came to pass in Iconium, that they went both together into the synagogue of the Jews, and so spake, that a great multitude both of the Jews and also of the Greeks believed.

Let preachers so speak that their hearers are turned to God; so earnestly, so boldly, so simply, that dark understandings may be enlightened, stubborn hearts won. Who were our first forefathers in the faith, those who received it from the first missionaries who came to our own country, and handed it down from generation to generation? Whoever they were, God had us in view in their conversion. He was preparing a place in His Church for us who are living now.

2. But the unbelieving Jews stirred up the Gentiles, and made their minds evil affected against the brethren.

It is impossible to be neutral for long. Either for God or against Him, such is our way. Either we give ourselves to His love and service, or we endeavour by scoffs and persuasions to annoy or lead away His soldiers. These Jews encouraged the Gentiles against Christianity, suggesting that their temples would be deserted, their customs changed, their pleasures much diminished by this growing religion.

3. Long time therefore abode they speaking boldly in the Lord, which gave testimony unto the word of his grace, and granted signs and wonders to be done by their hands.

This gave them strength to feel a more than human power with them. What could they do by themselves against a world? but their Divine Master employed them as His instruments, wrought by their hands, confirmed what they did. Shall we ever convert any souls till we have come to rely on a greater strength than our own? It is the work of God's grace that we have to declare, not a device of man's wisdom.

4. But the multitude of the city was divided: and part held with the Jews, and part with the apostles.

May we be found on the right side, not on the wrong! This division is repeated throughout all ages, in almost every workshop, every gathering, every neighbourhood. Part scoff at the Gospel, part love and walk by it. If our place has been so far with the enemies of God's Word, yet we have now opportunity given us to choose the portion of His saints. It will be best in the end to have walked with them.

5. And when there was an assault made both of the Gentiles, and also of the Jews with their rulers, to use them despitefully, and to stone them, 6. they were ware of it, and fled unto Lystra and Derbe, cities of Lycaonia, and unto the region that lieth round about: 7. and there they preached the gospel.

Our Lord had bidden them fly to another city, when they were persecuted in that which they were in. The Word they carried was as a burning fire, either to cheer and warm hearts or to consume them with bitter hatred. It spread from place to place, and found everywhere gallant defenders as well as spiteful foes. The Gospel had been hidden for so many ages in God's secret counsels. Now the time was come to spread it throughout the world, and the men come to set it forth.

8. ¶ And there sat a certain man at Lystra, impotent in his feet, being a cripple from his mother's womb, who never had walked:

Those who are whole and strong should thank God for this gift more than they do, and they should regard with more care and kindness

than is common those to whom in His wisdom He has appointed a different lot. I feel that I have been very hard-hearted towards lame, or blind, or bedridden neighbours; I have done little or nothing to render their life more tolerable.

9. The same heard Paul speak: who stedfastly beholding him, and perceiving that he had faith to be healed,

This lame man listened with attention and respect to S. Paul's preaching. He had faith in what the apostle said about God, and loved His messengers. Many who can walk well, neglect to come to church or sit there carelessly. Their indifference prevents their finding any good, while humble persons go away with a blessing.

10. Said with a loud voice, Stand upright on thy feet. And he leaped and walked.

This figures the inward power of God's Word. It gives life and strength to the soul. It enables those who believe to rise up to a new and vigorous service. Let not its power be lost in my case. I need exceedingly something to stir me up to do better. My old sins seem often to weigh me down, and prevent my moving on one step towards God.

11. And when the people saw what Paul had done, they lifted up their voices, saying in the speech of Lycaonia, The gods are come down to us in the likeness of men. 12. And they called Barnabas, Jupiter; and Paul, Mercurius, because he was the chief speaker.

Heathens had many tales to tell of the visits of their gods in human shape. This, they thought, was another such visit. They had lost faith in one true and living God, but fancied endless powers in earth and air, who were like fairies, indeed often like very wayward or sinful men. We are happy in resting upon the loving Providence of our merciful Father, Whom the Gospel reveals to us.

13. Then the priest of Jupiter, which was before their city, brought oxen and garlands unto the gates, and would have done sacrifice with the people.

The heathen priest was ready to offer costly sacrifices to his gods, whom he supposed to be present, and shall we be behind in offering our best prayers and duty to our dear Lord and Master, Who is spiritually among us in His holy Church? He requires not oxen and garlands, but an obedient heart and pure life.

14. Which when the apostles, Barnabas and Paul, heard of, they rent their clothes, and ran in among the people, crying out,

Shocked and grieved they were at this false worship. They behaved as people would in a fire or some great danger. It seemed to them

horrible that men should waste their worship on their fellow-men instead of paying it where it was due. The apostles sought truth above all things, and refused to put up with a lie, even though it was for their own honour.

15. And saying, Sirs, why do ye these things? We also are men of like passions with you, and preach unto you that ye should turn from these vanities unto the living God, which made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and all things that are therein:

Man's frailty, God's Altnightiness—such was S. Paul's text. Men are compassed with infirmity, full of weakness in body and soul, but God is almighty, all-perfect, all-glorious. The very nothingness of created life drives us to take refuge in His unchanging Being. All things speak of a wisdom, and power, and goodness that devised them. Simple minds can easily perceive this witness of God which creation offers.

16. Who in times past suffered all nations to walk in their own ways.

It is a great grace to be born in times of light. We enjoy opportunities and blessings which many ages knew not of. God has revealed His way, the way that leads to heaven. How wretched we should be if, after knowing His way, we turned back and walked in our own selfish, careless, unbelieving ways again!

17. Nevertheless he left not himself without witness, in that he did good, and gave us rain from heaven, and fruitful seasons, filling our hearts with food and gladness.

Even heathens enjoyed this natural witness of God. They might have discerned in the world, and in Providence, and in their own hearts tokens of an overshadowing Power and Love. God would have His reasonable creatures good and happy; He delights in their wellbeing; He has made all things wonderfully to minister to them. Sin and misery are not what He appoints for them, but rather a peaceful, pure, loving existence. Such lessons even heathens might have tried to spell out.

18. And with these sayings scarce restrained they the people, that they had not done sacrifice unto them.

In the preceding three verses we see how this great missionary spoke to simple heathens. It was not the time for him yet to tell them about our Saviour, or the Holy Spirit, or Church ordinances. He did not speak of the Atonement or of conversion; all that would come later. What he did was to show how even their own hearts bore witness to a Maker and Preserver. He appealed to their knowledge of the one true God as manifested by His works.

19. ¶ And there came thither certain Jews from Antioch

and Iconium, who persuaded the people, and, having stoned Paul, drew him out of the city, supposing he had been dead.

What a change! S. Paul was thought a god not long before; now he is a condemned malefactor, too bad to live. It is like Jesus our Saviour, Who was greeted with shouts of "Hosanna" one day, and with "Crucify Him" not long after. This is the way the world's caresses soon turn to hatred. Those who look to God only are not too much tickled by the flattery nor overcome by the threats or blows.

20. Howbeit, as the disciples stood round about him, he rose up, and came into the city: and the next day he departed with Barnabas to Derbe.

S. Paul had yet much work to do for his Master; so he was raised up out of apparent death, and was able to re-enter the city whence he had been dragged as one dead. How often in his life he looked death in the face! When he had to wrestle with it at last its terrors must have been all spent. So long as life remained he was busy in winning souls. No dangers or opposition could cure him of that.

21. And when they had preached the gospel to that city, and had taught many, they returned again to Lystra, and to Iconium, and Antioch,

Why, these are just the very places where they had been so reviled and ill-used. They returned to visit the converts, to encourage, teach, and comfort them. Lord, grant us perseverance in good works after the pattern of Thy saints. Let us not be content with one good action, but rather rejoice to persevere in helping, teaching, doing good to our brethren. We must not leave young Christians to face the world without giving them all the help we can.

22. Confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God.

What a curious way of attracting men to Christ! If they had said that those who enter the kingdom of God would have prosperous days, full purses, comforts all round them, then they might indeed have won many; but here are grave and sad words. The way of the Cross is set before Christians for their road, as it was Christ's own. Nay, this will turn to sweetness at last. It is indeed rough and grievous for awhile, and the apostles were quite right to say so, only there will come with it an inward joy which overcomes the tribulation. Above all, when we are safe in heaven, who will mind past sufferings?

23. And when they had ordained them elders in every church, and had prayed with fasting, they commended them to the Lord, on whom they believed.

Here is the appointment of the settled ministry of the Church. The word "elders" is in Greek "presbyters," and this has been shortened into our English word "priests." Though apostles had done the work of conversion and incorporation into Christ, yet there needed daily teaching, daily worship, daily comfort and guidance, and for these ends the apostles appointed a settled parochial ministry; not as if men should put their trust in men, but that priest and people alike might be stirred up to cling more closely to their one true Lord from Whom all good comes.

24. And after they had passed throughout Pisidia, they came to Pamphylia. 25. And when they had preached the word in Perga, they went down into Attalia: 26. and thence sailed to Antioch, from whence they had been recommended to the grace of God for the work which they fulfilled.

They felt that they had been helped by their brethren's prayers. The Christians at Antioch, though they remained at home, had yet co-operated in what was done, because their thoughts and prayers had gone along with the missionaries. We, though we remain at home, may yet take a loving interest in the progress of the Gospel in far-distant lands. We may collect means for it, and read and think about it.

27. And when they were come, and had gathered the church together, they rehearsed all that God had done with them, and how he had opened the door of faith unto the Gentiles.

They did not magnify themselves, but God, Who had wrought by their means and opened hearts to listen. How can we do any good unless God works by us and makes a way for our steps? Our weakness is thus joined to His Almighty Power. He opens doors which are fast shut, so far as man can reckon, but they are flung wide when He knocks.

28. And there they abode long time with the disciples.

This time of rest must have been grateful to S. Paul's heart. He loved his friends, and felt grievously the continual partings which his missionary life required; but now for two or three years it is God's will that he should remain in one place, learning and teaching, preparing for future work, employing this opportunity in perfecting the worship and government of the Church, and in training fit helpers for the ministry. He was never idle nor ill employed.

CHAPTER XV.

1. Great dissension ariseth touching circumcision. 6. The apostles consult about it, 22. and send their determination by letters to the churches. 36. Paul and Barnabas, thinking to visit the brethren together, fall at strife, and depart asunder.

AND certain men which came down from Judæa taught the brethren, and said, Except ye be circumcised after the manner of Moses, ye cannot be saved.

These mistaken Christians wished to add the performance of Moses' law to the requirements of the Gospel. They said that repentance, and faith, and a Christian life were not enough for salvation, unless believers kept in addition all the legal observances. Let us be wiser. Christ alone is our hope ; we trust not in our own merits, nor duties, nor feelings, but in His redeeming love alone. The Son of God, Who died for us, can save us, He and none other ; our hearts can rest on Him even in the hour of death.

2. When therefore Paul and Barnabas had no small dissension and disputation with them, they determined that Paul and Barnabas, and certain other of them, should go up to Jerusalem unto the apostles and elders about this question.

This was a matter of life and death. S. Paul had been raised up for this very purpose. Either the Gospel was living, the true Jerusalem above, the Lord Jesus a sufficient Saviour, or else S. Paul had been altogether deluded. Glory be to God for raising us up such a champion to defend our liberty ! May we be as much in earnest when God's truth is attacked in these days.

3. And being brought on their way by the church, they passed through Phenice and Samaria, declaring the conversion of the Gentiles : and they caused great joy unto all the brethren.

These Christians were not stingy. They did not desire to keep the treasure of faith to themselves. No, they knew that that treasure grows by being imparted. It was joy to them to feel that so many more, day by day, were sharing in faith, and prayer, and communion with Christ. What greater joy is there than to find those who were careless once now believing and loving, and indeed going far ahead of ourselves ?

4. And when they were come to Jerusalem, they were received of the church, and of the apostles and elders, and they declared all things that God had done with them.

It was God's doing, not their own. What but Divine power could have wrought on Gentile hearts, on the mighty and ignorant alike, on men of strange tongues and ways, to listen to these despised Jews, give up their idols, forsake their sins, embrace the mysteries and stand the trials of Christians?

5. But there rose up certain of the sect of the Pharisees which believed, saying, That it was needful to circumcise them, and to command them to keep the law of Moses.

These Christian Pharisees clung to the earthly life of Jesus Christ. They remembered how He had kept the law Himself, and spoken only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel ; but they forgot His Death, how He had died as a true and all-prevailing Sacrifice, they forgot His heavenly life, His Divine Lordship over all men. The Holy Sacrament of Redemption seemed little in their sight beside the legal offerings.

6. ¶ And the apostles and elders came together for to consider of this matter.

Here first we find what is called a General Council, where the ministers of the Church met together to declare what the faith was which Christ the Lord had taught them. The question at this time was, Must Christians be Jews too ? is it needful to add Jewish rites to the worship and life of a believer ? God in His mercy has made us members of the Holy Catholic Church, and given us a share in that faith, and worship, and life which have been handed down from the apostles' time. May we persevere in it all our days.

7. And when there had been much disputing, Peter rose up, and said unto them, Men and brethren, ye know how that a good while ago God made choice among us, that the Gentiles by my mouth should hear the word of the gospel, and believe.

When God has clearly spoken why do we search farther ? This was S. Peter's point which he urged on the council. He said that in the conversion of Cornelius, about ten years before, God had clearly manifested His decision that Gentiles were fit to receive the Holy Spirit and Christian baptism without being subject to Jewish ordinances. He has in His mercy made many other things beside this clearly known to us. Our business is to obey Him without disputing.

8. And God, which knoweth the hearts, bare them witness, giving them the Holy Ghost, even as he did unto us ; 9. and put no difference between us and them, purifying their hearts by faith.

Visible gifts of the Holy Spirit had sealed that conversion. God took possession of those Gentile hearts, and claimed them for His own. Nor does He less truly come to dwell in hearts now. He

chooses not the wise or mighty ones, not those of high repute or great religious profession. A simple child's heart is fit to receive the Comforter with all His blessed gifts.

10. Now therefore why tempt ye God, to put a yoke upon the neck of the disciples, which neither our fathers nor we were able to bear?

The law was a help when it led men to seek for a Saviour, to long for true holiness from above, to abhor evil and aim at inward as well as outward purity; but to those who made it an end it became a snare; it entangled consciences, made the weak despair, took up men's time with shadows. God grant that our religion may be a service of love. Let us cling by faith to a Divine Saviour Who alone can enable us to obey Him in any way, and can atone for our disobediences.

11. But we believe that through the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ we shall be saved, even as they.

The chief among the apostles, in the first council of the Church, laid down the doctrine of grace. It is God's free mercy alone that saves us. He has displayed it in His dear Son's Incarnation and Death, has brought it home through His Church to each of our souls. We trust in this and in nothing else. When our last hour comes we will not recite any catalogue of our good deeds, but pray, "O Saviour of the world, Who by Thy Cross and precious Death hast redeemed us, save us and help us, we humbly beseech Thee, O Lord."

12. ¶ Then all the multitude kept silence, and gave audience to Barnabas and Paul, declaring what miracles and wonders God had wrought among the Gentiles by them.

We have read of these marvels in the thirteenth and fourteenth chapters, and no doubt there were many others not mentioned there. God had sent these miracles in order to gain a hearing for the apostles, to declare His Presence with them, and dispose hearts to receive their message. Converts were first attracted by the miracles, but soon found a surer evidence in the depth and power of the Gospel. They proved it to be from God by their own experience.

13. ¶ And after they had held their peace, James answered, saying, Men and brethren, hearken unto me:

This was James, called the Lord's brother because he was near akin to the Lord Jesus. It was he who wrote the epistle that is placed after the Epistle to the Hebrews in our Bibles. He was a strict observer of the Jewish law, and head of all the Jewish Christians. Yet God had opened his eyes to see that Christ died for all men, and that the new law of liberty had made the old law to be of less

account. God's Spirit, and love for the great missionary apostles, and a sense of the blessings and graces of the Gospel, triumphed in him over his Jewish feelings.

14. *Simeon hath declared how God at the first did visit the Gentiles, to take out of them a people for his name.*

Christians are a people set apart to God. His holy Name has been pronounced over them. They are consecrated in soul and body to show forth His glory. His mercy has visited us in our day, and joined us to this blessed company. Let us live according to His gracious purpose for us.

15. *And to this agree the words of the prophets; as it is written, 16. After this I will return, and will build again the tabernacle of David, which is fallen down; and I will build again the ruins thereof, and I will set it up:*

This was the promised restoration of Israel: not a literal earthly royalty, but a Divine kingdom under the Son of David, full of grace, and peace, and truth. God designed a far better kingdom for Israel than they knew of. David's conquering spear and Solomon's throne of gold were weak and poor compared to Christ's wisdom and might.

17. *That the residue of men might seek after the Lord, and all the Gentiles, upon whom my name is called, saith the Lord, who doeth all these things.*

This was the promised extension of true religion throughout the world. It was to accompany the Gospel message to Israel. Both were parts of one great plan. We must not despont, for our salvation rests on God, not on our own strength. As He has mercifully and wonderfully redeemed and called us, and guided us for so long, so we may not doubt He will fulfil all His promises for us.

18. *Known unto God are all his works from the beginning of the world.*

God's best works are redeemed souls. Nothing else that He has made, however precious or mighty, can compare in value with those. In the depths of eternity, before we had any being, God's love regarded us, and determined we should be Christians, heirs of life and glory.

19. *Wherefore my sentence is, that we trouble not them, which from among the Gentiles are turned to God.*

To be obliged to observe the law would have been a great hindrance to the conversion of Gentiles. Many of its precepts would have seemed strange, many would have been impossible for them to

keep. God's mercy has set us free from all that bondage. Let us be grateful to Him, and gladly observe the easy yoke and light burden of duty which still remains. If we bear it bravely it will become lighter and lighter. Take trouble to do right, and it will turn at last into endless joy.

20. But that we write unto them, that they abstain from pollutions of idols, and from fornication, and from things strangled, and from blood.

S. James desired the Church to be all one. It grieved him that there should be divisions and separations. He bade the Gentiles abridge their liberty in some things, and the Jews give way on others, so that they might bear to live together, and approach God's altar side by side. Gentiles had to learn from the Jews the law of purity. They must not defile themselves with any uncleanness, now that they have become members of Christ and children of God.

21. For Moses of old time hath in every city them that preach him, being read in the synagogues every sabbath day.

This custom of reading lessons from the Old Testament in public worship was continued by the Church of Christ, which added the New Testament also when it was written. Our Christian Sabbath, which is the Lord's Day, should be sanctified as the Jewish Sabbath was by attendance in God's house to hear His Word and pray to Him. He has been pleased to lay up for us a store of instruction in Holy Scripture. There we listen to preachers whose words may always profit us.

22. Then pleased it the apostles and elders, with the whole church, to send chosen men of their own company to Antioch with Paul and Barnabas; namely, Judas surnamed Barsabas, and Silas, chief men among the brethren:

Judas and Silas went as witnesses to testify to the Jewish Christians that the council had really released Gentile Christians from the burden of the law. Being Jews of Jerusalem themselves, they were likely to be heard if any one could be. Their mission was to preach peace and unite hearts together. If only such pains had been always taken believers would not have been so divided as we see they are now.

23. And they wrote letters by them after this manner; The apostles and elders and brethren send greeting unto the brethren which are of the Gentiles in Antioch and Syria and Cilicia:

Here we find the Jewish Church greeting Gentile Christians; the one had accepted Christ the Lord as the foretold Seed of David, the true Fulfiller of the old dispensation, and the others had come out of their heathen darkness to worship the One true God as manifested to men in His dear and only Son. Both parties were

now members of one holy universal Church which was rising up as a great building, having its foundation everywhere in the needs of human hearts. Such was God's great plan.

24. Forasmuch as we have heard, that certain which went out from us have troubled you with words, subverting your souls, saying, Ye must be circumcised, and keep the law: to whom we gave no such commandment:

Many people since those days have made like mistakes in religion, enforcing things unnecessary and omitting the true and only foundation. God grant that our religion may be a trust in God's mercy through Christ, casting aside all confidence in ourselves. What can our own warm feelings or pious practices do to save us? Nay, we will give up ourselves wholly to that dear and merciful Lord Who died for our salvation. To whom else can we look?

25. It seemed good unto us, being assembled with one accord, to send chosen men unto you with our beloved Barnabas and Paul, 26. men that have hazarded their lives for the name of our Lord Jesus Christ.

This was high praise for SS. Paul and Barnabas. They gave up not only ease and credit, but their own lives, when Christ's cause required it. After endless risks and dangers, they were at last crowned by a martyr's death; it came true at last, that they did lay their lives down. How shall we, who shrink from little sacrifices, ever rise to such a height of love? Our daily selfishness and ill-temper weigh us down and make us forget whose soldiers we are.

27. We have sent therefore Judas and Silas, who shall also tell you the same things by mouth. 28. For it seemed good to the Holy Ghost, and to us, to lay upon you no greater burden than these necessary things;

These rules that follow were necessary. Judas and Silas, who were to join Paul and Barnabas in setting the converts free from Jewish ceremonies, were also to enforce upon them the need of observing certain rules. The Gospel which lightens the burden of sorrow and fear and a guilty heart, yet bids us take up a certain daily burden of duty and self-denial, subjects us to our brethren, and bids us join in bearing their load. Only in all this the dear Lord helps us to bear, and Himself bears it with us.

29. That ye abstain from meats offered to idols, and from blood, and from things strangled, and from fornication: from which if ye keep yourselves, ye shall do well. Fare ye well.

God keep us from joining in sinful merry-making, which is like an idol-feast, and from offending our brethren's conscience by the

words we say or things we do, and from indulging in any impurity of word or deed. We cannot live on without helping or hindering other souls. Remember, we cannot recall harm done. An idle blasphemous word, a sinful act, cannot be undone. If we would spare ourselves bitter memories in time to come, let all our life be laid out on the plan of self-sacrifice, as Jesus Christ showed us the way.

30. So when they were dismissed, they came to Antioch : and when they had gathered the multitude together, they delivered the epistle : 31. which when they had read, they rejoiced for the consolation.

They rejoiced at being set free from the yoke of Moses' law ; they rejoiced because Christ's Name was declared sufficient, His grace all-powerful to save. Most of these believers were poor, many of them were afflicted and persecuted for their faith, still they were able to rejoice. In those services and conversations which they had as Christians they found a store of comfort which lasted them among heathen comrades, and jeers, and blows.

32. And Judas and Silas, being prophets also themselves, exhorted the brethren with many words, and confirmed them.

How many of us have been stirred up by the words of some preacher whom God has intrusted with a message for our souls ! The world seemed nothing, sin was vile, grace all-powerful, heaven near, while those words sounded in our ears. Let us revive the old impressions, let prayer bring back to us the memory of those accents which lit up a new life within.

33. And after they had tarried there a space, they were let go in peace from the brethren unto the apostles. 34. Notwithstanding it pleased Silas to abide there still.

Glory be to God for those whose words or writings have helped us onward ! Oftentimes it was not so much themselves as God's Spirit that used them as instruments. God lent them to us for awhile at the moment when we needed them. He Who works by such means is able still to lead us by His grace when human guides are withdrawn.

35. Paul also and Barnabas continued in Antioch, teaching and preaching the word of the Lord, with many others also.

S. Paul was employed in knitting together Jewish and Gentile converts into one body. We see from his Epistles how hard a task this was, and how even the other apostles hindered him sometimes. He spoke of one redeeming Sacrifice which had atoned for all men's sins, of one Holy Spirit that had come to renew hearts ; and in the light of these truths which he set forth the privileges of the Jews

seemed as nothing. Yet he had so great a love for his own people that he could speak tenderly and reverently of all that belonged to them.

36. ¶ And some days after Paul said unto Barnabas, Let us go again and visit our brethren in every city where we have preached the word of the Lord, and see how they do.

How precarious good impressions are ! how much they need following up ! The apostles thought of their converts ; how much they needed further teaching, how new and weak they were in the faith. They felt anxious for them amidst the many temptations which they had to meet. It is not enough for us to begin well ; there is great need to watch over the beginnings of grace and pray God to perfect them.

37. And Barnabas determined to take with them John, whose surname was Mark. 38. But Paul thought not good to take him with them, who departed from them from Pamphylia, and went not with them to the work.

S. Barnabas thought of Mark's gifts, of his holy mother and how much she had done for Christians, and of the love which he himself felt for him. S. Paul feared lest he should fail a second time, and be upset by the new dangers and trials of a missionary's life. He came long afterwards to see how useful Mark could be, when he wrote for him to come shortly before his own death (2 Tim. iv. 11). No doubt in the years between S. Mark had learnt many things, and acquired courage and perseverance.

39. And the contention was so sharp between them, that they departed asunder one from the other : and so Barnabas took Mark, and sailed unto Cyprus ;

Alas ! here are two saints at variance ; so it often is in this sad world. They were both Christians, both in earnest, both bent on doing the Lord's work, but they could no longer do it together. No doubt in after days each came to make allowance for the other ; they pardoned what had been amiss, they loved each other still. They have long since met in that blessed place where all misunderstandings are removed.

40. And Paul chose Silas, and departed, being recommended by the brethren unto the grace of God. 41. And he went through Syria and Cilicia, confirming the churches.

Confirm us, O Lord, by the teaching and the ordinances which Christian ministers exhibit to us in these days ; our need is urgent, for we are weak and encompassed by temptations. Let us seek Divine grace by all means which God offers to us. He is pleased to employ the instrumentality of our brethren to supply us with light, and strength, and comfort.

CHAPTER XVI.

1. Paul having circumcised Timothy, 7. and being called by the Spirit from one country to another, 14. converteth Lydia, 16. casteth out a spirit of divination. 19. For which cause he and Silas are whipped and imprisoned. 26. The prison doors are opened. 31. The jailor is converted, 37. and they are delivered.

THEN came he to Derbe and Lystra: and, behold, a certain disciple was there, named Timotheus, the son of a certain woman, which was a Jewess, and believed; but his father was a Greek: 2. which was well reported of by the brethren that were at Lystra and Iconium.

We are now going to trace out S. Paul's second missionary journey. He began it with the desire of visiting his former converts in Asia Minor, but God led him on and on till he found the way into our own continent of Europe, and planted the first seeds of the Gospel for us. First of all, when he visited Lystra, where he had been so near death on the former occasion, God raised up for him thence his dearest and most cherished helper, one who should be to him as a son, and succeed to his cares and labours when he died. What a great gift was this! one which he had reason to thank God for all the rest of his life.

3. *Him would Paul have to go forth with him; and took and circumcised him because of the Jews which were in those quarters: for they knew all that his father was a Greek.*

But were not Christians free from this law, and did not S. Paul contend zealously for their liberty? Yes, but he did not forbid as yet that Jews should keep the law, and he knew that Jews would not listen to Timothy unless they were sure that he was one of themselves. He desired to win his brethren to believe, and for this end he would remove all difficulties from their way.

4. *And as they went through the cities, they delivered them the decrees for to keep, that were ordained of the apostles and elders which were at Jerusalem.*

They taught Christians that they were members of one Holy Catholic Church which was under the government of the apostles, and received faith and worship at their hands. They bade Gentile Christians be pure, and avoid anything that would offend or scandalize their brethren. They bade Jewish Christians be charitable, and remember that God had made and Christ had died for all men, and that a time of freedom had come as regards the

precepts of the law. They might keep them if they thought good, but God did not enjoin them on all.

5. And so were the churches established in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Why is not the Church rooted in faith nowadays? Why does the number of true believers remain stationary or diminish? Alas! ever since the Church came to lean on an arm of flesh, it has been different. In those early days the Gospel wrought wholly from within; it was Divine and heavenly, and felt to rest on a different footing from Cæsar's decrees.

6. Now when they had gone throughout Phrygia and the region of Galatia, and were forbidden of the Holy Ghost to preach the word in Asia,

We are left to guess at trials, and sufferings, and victories all this while. We know indeed from the Epistle to the Galatians how those people had delighted in the great apostle's visit, how he had seemed to them like an angel of God, how they counted themselves blessed in having him among them. Yet he could not stay there. An unseen hand was leading him onward our way. We too were in God's merciful design.

7. After they were come to Mysia, they assayed to go into Bithynia: but the Spirit suffered them not.

Why? were there not souls there waiting for the Gospel? We cannot fathom the Divine purpose. God offers His message to a soul, or to a people, in His own time and manner. He has His hours of approach. Our part is to open the door readily to that gracious Visitor when He draws near.

8. And they passing by Mysia came down to Troas.

They must not go to left nor to right. God led them on, by a guidance they could not doubt, straight down to the shore of the sea which divided Asia from Europe. There they waited at Troas, close to the scene of old Troy, which had been made famous by the wars, and joys, and sorrows of the old heroic days. Here were warriors come to it now who served under a better Captain, and fought for a brighter crown than Homer knew of.

9. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night; There stood a man of Macedonia, and prayed him, saying, Come over into Macedonia, and help us.

That was us. It was the people of our continent of Europe stretching out their hands in the darkness and entreating for a guide. We sought for light to know God and ourselves, comfort in the hour of death, help against daily temptations. Man could not provide us with these precious gifts, so God sent His inspired apostle to bring them.

10. And after he had seen the vision, immediately we endeavoured to go into Macedonia, assuredly gathering that the Lord had called us for to preach the gospel unto them.

Here we first find S. Luke with S. Paul. No doubt his skill in medicine and in writing, and other powers and gifts that he had, were made useful for the work of the Gospel. What are our best endowments for save to offer for His service Who has lent them to us? It would be a pity to cultivate the gifts and forget the Giver.

11. Therefore loosing from Troas, we came with a straight course to Samothracia, and the next day to Neapolis; 12. and from thence to Philippi, which is the chief city of that part of Macedonia, and a colony: and we were in that city abiding certain days.

Few people in that city noticed the arrival of S. Paul and his friends. Few would have thought he had anything precious to offer. Lord, open our eyes to observe Thy ways, and our ears to listen to Thy gracious words. The world's bustle comes between us and Thee. Let us seek for quiet moments in which to hearken.

13. And on the sabbath we went out of the city by a river side, where prayer was wont to be made; and we sat down, and spake unto the women which resorted thither.

Those who believed in the God of Israel were very few in that place. They had scarcely so much as a room to meet in; only a few poor women gathered by the river-side there, yet the great apostle devoted his eloquence to enlighten them. He never thought trouble and pains thrown away. He knew that each of these souls was dear to Christ.

14. ¶ And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple, of the city of Thyatira, which worshipped God, heard us: whose heart the Lord opened, that she attended unto the things which were spoken of Paul.

Many hearts are fast closed against grace, but this woman's heart was opened by God. She not only heard, but attended; not only attended, but came forward to profess her faith and seek for holy baptism. Remember, it is not only eloquent preachers or sincere hearers, but the all-powerful grace of God disposing words and hearts that can accomplish true conversion.

15. And when she was baptized, and her household, she besought us, saying, If ye have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come into my house, and abide there. And she constrained us.

This woman and her family were the beginning of the Philippian Church. It was about ten years afterwards that S. Paul wrote to them his Epistle to the Philippians, in which he calls them his joy and crown, and exchanges so many grateful and loving words with them. He unfolds great mysteries to them, commends their faith and love highly. All this came out of this one woman's listening to the apostle. May God accept our humble faith and prayers, and make them grow into wider good, if it so pleases Him.

16. ¶ And it came to pass, as we went to prayer, a certain damsel possessed with a spirit of divination met us, which brought her masters much gain by soothsaying :

How strange there should be such a thing as possession, that the soul and body of one of God's reasonable creatures should be thus enthralled by an evil spirit that spoke with her lips! It is indeed marvellous, but I find that drink, lust, and violent temper have something the same effects now; they possess the will, they make men helpless slaves. Lord, keep me from the devil's tyranny. I tremble when I think how nearly I have been enslaved by him before now.

17. The same followed Paul and us, and cried, saying, These men are the servants of the most high God, which shew unto us the way of salvation.

True enough, though the devil made her say it. No doubt evil spirits see clearly which is God's truth, and who His servants are, though they have no part with Him. May we have such knowledge while it can profit us.

18. And this did she many days. But Paul, being grieved, turned and said to the spirit, I command thee in the name of Jesus Christ to come out of her. And he came out the same hour.

S. Paul disliked flattery, he would not have himself followed by vain words of applause, and he knew no good could come of devils preaching. There must be love and purity, or at least a desire for holiness, before any one's word can do good to another soul; how can a slave of Satan win any one to be free?

19. ¶ And when her masters saw that the hope of their gains was gone, they caught Paul and Silas, and drew them into the marketplace unto the rulers,

Now the girl was free from Satan's power, but she had no longer her supernatural gifts of knowledge, she could no longer tell fortunes or show people how to find what was lost. Her masters were grieved that they could no longer profit by her misery. When the drink traffic, which now makes such enormous gains out of the

people's ruin, is put under stricter regulations and the people delivered from its fascination, will not true Christians rejoice instead of grieving?

20. And brought them to the magistrates, saying, These men, being Jews, do exceedingly trouble our city,

This is the world's view of religious earnestness. It is simply worry and annoyance. Why do these men trouble our easy careless ways with grave words about judgment, and reminders of our mother's teaching, and our early prayers and childish faith again? We would sooner put away such cares and live a jolly life. Alas! it is needful to trouble you, death and hell are real enough.

21. And teach customs, which are not lawful for us to receive, neither to observe, being Romans.

This was a lie, for the Gospel did not interfere with Roman laws or the duties of good citizens. Nay, it made them far more obedient and better citizens than they were otherwise; yet still it brought new ways, new life, new duties. It had to fight against the prejudices of that mighty Empire. Only God's Spirit could win in such a struggle.

22. And the multitude rose up together against them: and the magistrates rent off their clothes, and commanded to beat them.

It seems strange that these great ministers of God should be left so helpless in their enemies' hands. They had no chance to defend themselves or say a word. Yet such are God's ways. He knows how to advance His cause even by shame and suffering. His victories are won by the most unlikely means.

23. And when they had laid many stripes upon them, they cast them into prison, charging the jailor to keep them safely: 24. who, having received such a charge, thrust them into the inner prison, and made their feet fast in the stocks.

If we had seen these saints dragged off thus amidst blows and revilings, we might have thought they were great criminals who had met well-deserved punishment; but the Lord sees quite differently. He bids us remember that His friends, His cause, His truth are often just what the world abhors most. Oh for eyes to see and courage to maintain what is right when the days of trouble come!

25. ¶ And at midnight Paul and Silas prayed, and sang praises unto God: and the prisoners heard them.

They would not miss their accustomed prayers and psalms even at such a time. Nay, they prayed with such fervour, such comfort,

such joy, as prosperous days could not give. They did not reproach God with their sufferings. His great mercies to them so filled their hearts that they had no thought of complaining.

26. And suddenly there was a great earthquake, so that the foundations of the prison were shaken: and immediately all the doors were opened, and every one's bands were loosed.

God's Providence can penetrate the deepest dungeon. Thick walls and heavy chains are no barrier between Him and us. He is pleased for a while to leave fetters unbroken, wickedness unshaken, not because He is weak, but because His wisdom knows best. His time will come. One day a great shock will overthrow all that seems most settled. Some will meet that day with only fear, others with both fear and joy.

27. And the keeper of the prison awaking out of his sleep, and seeing the prison doors open, he drew out his sword, and would have killed himself, supposing that the prisoners had been fled. 28. But Paul cried with a loud voice, saying, Do thyself no harm: for we are all here.

Suicide seemed to the heathen an easy remedy for any disaster, but God's Word bids us await patiently His summons before we leave the world. He bids us do ourselves no harm. Despair is harmful to both soul and body. May God keep alive in our hearts a confidence in His mercy, a dutiful submission to His guidance all our days.

29. Then he called for a light, and sprang in, and came trembling, and fell down before Paul and Silas,

The prison was light now instead of being left in darkness, and the keeper of it was full of fear and reverence instead of his former indifference. God had touched his heart and made him see Divine messengers in these two suffering and despised prisoners. Divine grace can triumph over the hardest and dullest hearts. This man must have witnessed with indifference many sad scenes, many criminals overwhelmed with confusion, but now the time was come for him to feel his own condition.

30. And brought them out, and said, Sirs, what must I do to be saved?

These words are like S. Paul's own at his conversion, "Lord, what wilt thou have me to do?" It is the cry of many a soul that feels the nothingness of pleasure, the nearness of death, the great insufficiency of our own strength. We entreat those who seem to know the way to point us how we may ourselves find it. God give us grace to listen for a right answer and follow it.

31. And they said, Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved, and thy house.

This is the way for all. Faith in the Lord Jesus here includes trusting in Him, loving Him, obeying Him. He becomes our Master, and we will walk as His faithful servants. He is no mere man who died once for us, but a living Lord to Whom we look continually, and Who never forsakes His own. He Who has done so much for us will assuredly perfect our salvation.

32. And they spake unto him the word of the Lord, and to all that were in his house.

They were instructed in repentance, in faith, about Holy Baptism. Consider with what clearness and reverence the apostle would put all this, and how earnestly this little congregation drank in his words. I suppose they never forgot that night's first instruction in the Gospel. The memory of it must have been always dear to their hearts.

33. And he took them the same hour of the night, and washed their stripes ; and was baptized, he and all his, straightway.

As they had done so much for him, he delighted in doing what he could to comfort them. He made willingly an exchange of his care for their bodies against their care for his soul. He, his children, and household were all together made members of Christ and children of God on that happy and wonderful night. How little they had thought the evening before what mercies God had in store for them !

34. And when he had brought them into his house, he set meat before them, and rejoiced, believing in God with all his house.

May we willingly impart our comforts and services to Christ's poor members when they are in need of them. Why has the Lord lent some of us so much except that we might hand it on liberally to our brethren ? They have one Saviour and one hope with us, and have therefore a right to be helped cheerfully, as we find occasion.

35. And when it was day, the magistrates sent the serjeants, saying, Let those men go. 36. And the keeper of the prison told this saying to Paul, The magistrates have sent to let you go : now therefore depart, and go in peace.

What a change from last night's orders ! Then it was hard words, and scourges, and safe keeping ; now they were to be set free and go in peace. Whether it was conscience only, or news of the earthquake, or advice from others, that so wrought with the magistrates, we know not. Christ's servants may be sure that their innocence will come out one day ; their Divine Master will vindicate their cause at last, even though for a while they may have been counted evil-doers.

37. But Paul said unto them, They have beaten us openly

uncondemned, being Romans, and have cast us into prison; and now do they thrust us out privily? nay verily; but let them come themselves and fetch us out.

This was not pride, but a desire to uphold the credit of Christians. Paul and Silas were not convicted criminals, but, on the contrary, innocent men most illegally and unjustly used. The Church of Christ had not been dishonoured by them, they could still worthily declare His Word. It is not vanity for us to be careful about our character. May God enable us to keep a good report all our days unstained by any just blame.

38. And the serjeants told these words unto the magistrates: and they feared, when they heard that they were Romans. 39. And they came and besought them, and brought them out, and desired them to depart out of the city.

One might say the magistrates feared men more than God. They did not blame themselves for injustice or harshness, still less did they seek to learn the message which the apostle had to teach; but they desired to avoid blame themselves, and to prevent anything more being said. All they wanted was peace and security, not guidance from above.

40. And they went out of the prison, and entered into the house of Lydia: and when they had seen the brethren, they comforted them, and departed.

Lord, give us hearts like these to pass readily over injuries done to ourselves, and think more of our brethren's fears and sorrows than of what becomes of us. Take away from us resentment and too much complaining. What are we that we should think to escape affliction? In comforting others we shall ourselves find strength and peace. We can read in the Epistle to the Philippians what S. Paul had to say to his friends at Philippi, and how they returned his love.

CHAPTER XVII.

2. Paul preacheth at Thessalonica, 4. where some believe, and others persecute him. 10. He is sent to Berea, and preacheth there. 13. Being persecuted at Thessalonica, 15. he cometh to Athens, and disputeth, and preacheth the living God to them unknown, 34. whereby many are converted unto Christ.

NOW when they had passed through Amphipolis and Apollonia, they came to Thessalonica, where was a synagogue of the Jews:

S. Paul has now set his face westward. He is on the highroad that leads to the great capital of the world. Perhaps he is already planning to go there. Many travellers, and soldiers, and traders went daily along the road from East to West, but here was one who could show the true way, lead soldiers against Satan, exhibit the pearl of great price. All the world's changes had been leading up to this, that Christ's Gospel should be preached.

2. And Paul, as his manner was, went in unto them, and three sabbath days reasoned with them out of the scriptures, 3. opening and alleging, that Christ must needs have suffered, and risen again from the dead; and that this Jesus, whom I preach unto you, is Christ.

Here are three heads of the apostle's discourse. He quoted passages from Scripture, and explained their sense, to show, first, that a suffering Christ was to be expected, One Who should share in pain, contempt, anguish of mind and body, not merely an earthly king; and secondly, that the Christ should overcome death, should take away this veil, overthrow this enemy; and lastly, he declared that all proofs of the Christ met in Jesus the Son of Mary, that He was the Divine King, that true hearts would acknowledge Him for their LORD.

4. And some of them believed, and consorted with Paul and Silas; and of the devout Greeks a great multitude, and of the chief women not a few.

We see from the Epistle to the Thessalonians, written not long after this time, what S. Paul had taught his converts there. He dwelt much on our Saviour's coming, how He would return in glory as our Judge. He also taught lessons of purity, and bade them by word and example work for their living, and set a pattern of honesty and uprightness. In that dark world what a glorious illumination was the news of the Gospel! Oh that we found in ourselves that same happy experience that the Christians at Thessalonica felt!

5. ¶ But the Jews which believed not, moved with envy, took unto them certain lewd fellows of the baser sort, and gathered a company, and set all the city on an uproar, and assaulted the house of Jason, and sought to bring them out to the people.

Many are zealous against good, apostles of unbelief, ready to fight against Christ. Surely His soldiers need be bold. They must not regard their own comfort or ease, they must put their Lord's cause first of all if they would win. If all the zeal, the courage, the labour that is spent on evil were only turned in the right direction we should see the whole earth become Christ's.

6. And when they found them not, they drew Jason and

certain brethren unto the rulers of the city, crying, These that have turned the world upside down are come hither also;

Does the Gospel really turn the world upside down? No, it makes no mischief, it teaches no evil, it knits hearts close together, it agrees with all common duties, and yet, in another sense, if it is real it must trouble false peace, it must bring new thoughts, new fears, new efforts. Lord, stir up our hearts with this salutary change that we may no longer dream on idly.

7. Whom Jason hath received: and these all do contrary to the decrees of Caesar, saying that there is another king, one Jesus.

True enough; we declare our Lord's royalty. We sing—

“The head that once was crowned with thorns
Is crowned with glory now.”

Yet this world's rulers need not be jealous of our King. His dominion gives them peace and honour. His crown is not one to interfere with theirs. Still I do not think that great people altogether like to believe in One above them, Who is their Judge, and Who observes and will punish their transgressions. The thought of Christ's royalty humbles this world's greatness into nothing.

8. And they troubled the people and the rulers of the city, when they heard these things. 9. And when they had taken security of Jason, and of the other, they let them go.

Divine Providence, which had permitted Paul and Silas to suffer cruel usage at Philippi, protected them from harm in this case; and yet it was painful to them after their late sufferings to have to leave so soon these kind friends who had welcomed them and received their teaching so gratefully. Their bodies were spared on this occasion, but they endured sorrow of heart.

10. ¶ And the brethren immediately sent away Paul and Silas by night unto Berea: who coming thither went into the synagogue of the Jews.

Nothing would prevent S. Paul from speaking to the Jews first in every place, he would try all ways to win them. He loved to show that his faith, and worship, and hope was one with theirs. He knew that our Lord had been born of that people. He brought out for us from the synagogue Jewish words of praise and prayer which we use daily in the Church of Christ.

11. These were more noble than those in Thessalonica, in that they received the word with all readiness of mind, and searched the scriptures daily, whether those things were so.

This then is true nobility, to be glad to learn, to take pains to study, to love Holy Scripture and know one's way in it. Whatever our birth is in this world's estimation, we may take high rank in God's sight if we love to hear everything good. Some people delight to hear of any wickedness, but we must thankfully fill our ears and minds with good learning, and so keep evil out.

12. Therefore many of them believed; also of honourable women which were Greeks, and of men, not a few.

They believed because they found the Gospel foreshadowed in the Old Testament. What S. Paul said to them about our Saviour corresponded with what psalmists and prophets had said long ago. God give us grace thus to compare the old and new covenants together, and see how all leads up to the full revelation of God in Jesus Christ.

13. But when the Jews of Thessalonica had knowledge that the word of God was preached of Paul at Berea, they came thither also, and stirred up the people. 14. And then immediately the brethren sent away Paul to go as it were to the sea: but Silas and Timotheus abode there still.

As the enemies of the Gospel were unwearied in their hatred, so the disciples were unwearied in their love and care for the safety of God's saints. So, too, God's Providence never slept, but wisely ordered all this so as to spread Christian preaching widely through the country. When the apostle was left alone without his friends to encounter perils and meet strange people, still we may be sure that he never lost the sense of that encompassing Divine love which would not forsake him.

15. And they that conducted Paul brought him unto Athens: and receiving a commandment unto Silas and Timotheus for to come to him with all speed, they departed.

He wished to hear of his converts' welfare. He saw new openings in Greece for the faith ; perhaps he had lonely hours when he longed for some heart on which to lean. Meanwhile he waited in Athens, which was a university town, full of learning, and grand buildings, and beautiful gardens. Great poets had sung there, great artists had painted there, but our Lord's Name was unknown. Without Him nothing can be quite complete.

16. ¶ Now while Paul waited for them at Athens, his spirit was stirred in him, when he saw the city wholly given to idolatry.

As God's servant, as the messenger of Christ's Gospel, he felt impatient that souls should be in such bondage. He longed to have God's goodness known to this people, who worshipped false imaginations, and even fancied that the gods countenanced evil. S.

Paul could not take delight in the beautiful city of Athens for grief at its idol-worship. True prayers, holy love, faith in God's goodness would have pleased him better than did all the grand temples and bright gardens.

17. Therefore disputed he in the synagogue with the Jews, and with the devout persons, and in the market daily with them that met with him.

The Jews and devout persons felt as he did about idols, but he had to reveal to them the true image of God in Christ. Apart from the Saviour they could not really know what God was like, all their best thoughts of God were realized in the Gospel. The heathens in the market knew not the true God at all, the apostle had to begin from the beginning with them ; he had a mission to all the world, he was always looking for souls.

18. Then certain philosophers of the Epicureans, and of the Stoicks, encountered him. And some said, What will this babbler say ? other some, He seemeth to be a setter forth of strange gods : because he preached unto them Jesus, and the resurrection.

Epicureans would say, We are poor creatures, let us live for our own pleasure, the gods do not take notice of what we do ; and Stoicks would speak of self-respect and the dignity of a good character. These latter wished to make man good, but could only appeal to his pride. How happy and blessed it is for us to learn the wretchedness of man through Christ's Cross, and the dignity of man through Christ's Resurrection ! Remember it is dangerous to think only of man's vileness, or only of his excellence ; but keep those truths both together, and regard them as set forth in our Lord's work. Without the Gospel, philosophy might only lead us astray.

19. And they took him, and brought him unto Areopagus, saying, May we know what this new doctrine, whereof thou speakest, is ? 20. For thou bringest certain strange things to our ears : we would know therefore what these things mean.

God's Providence so ordered it that the great apostle should have this opportunity of preaching His truth to the wise and learned. Generally it is the poor and simple to whom the message comes. But God has His own times of approach to all. He knows how to speak to our hearts. We are happy if we listen or read, not with mere curiosity, but with an earnest desire to profit. Even to hear S. Paul preach would do us no good unless we came to listen seriously.

21. (For all the Athenians and strangers which were there spent their time in nothing else, but either to tell, or to hear some new thing.)

If the only reading we cared for was the newspaper, the only talk we enjoyed was idle gossip, we should be so far like the Athenians. God's Word has a store of marvels in it which are fit to interest the deepest minds. His mysteries and mercies are always new, and yet old. Religious knowledge is not idle barren information, but something that is always fresh, and touches heart as well as head.

¶ Then Paul stood in the midst of Mars' hill, and said, Ye men of Athens, I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious.

They were very religious in their way, yet their religion was superstitious, not God's true service. They worshipped innumerable gods, and yet feared they might have left out some god or forgotten some sacrifice. Their religion carried with it an anxious fear of offending some divinity. Glory be to our merciful Father that we have been better taught! We rely on the love and mercy of our God; and though our service is most defective, yet we know of One Who has made a perfect offering for us.

23. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

Let not our God be thus unknown. These heathens, with all their lofty gifts, yet knew not the true God, but put endless idols in His place. They worshipped false gods, yet this inscription witnessed that they knew something was wanting. Our God is well known to us. We have seen Him in Christ Jesus, we know Him by a daily experience of His goodness.

24. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands;

We believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth. S. Paul began with this truth first of all, he taught that God is our Creator and Governor. We must begin with reverence for that incomprehensible Divine Power and Majesty that is above us. We are but frail creatures, and of a short time, and unworthy to stand in His Presence.

25. Neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth to all life, and breath, and all things;

God does not need our service, though we depend upon Him at every moment. He has mercifully imparted to us what is needful in nature and grace, only what rebellion it would be, what outrage, for creatures to use against God the mind and body that He has given them! This would be to turn His good gifts into confusion.

26. And hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation;

This is a summary of human history. God has directed it. His Providence has watched over our race as it grew and spread, and took possession of this country or that, and established such and such laws and customs in each. We can trace how God has educated the world. He is the Lord and Proprietor of the whole, and those who possess the most yet hold it under Him, and in order to carry out His wise purposes.

27. That they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us:

Here is a second truth about God. He is not only our Creator, but our Father too. We are in His image, and bound to love and worship Him. Every day we can stretch out our hands to Him in prayer. He is not far off then. When we come to the Holy Table we shall not miss Him there. If the way to Him in nature or in our own minds is sometimes hard to find, yet our dear Saviour is the Way. He brings God near to us.

28. For in him we live, and move, and have our being; as certain also of your own poets have said, For we are also his offspring.

Lord, from age to age Thou hast been our dwelling-place. If heathens could recognise the Divine Fatherhood, much more can we who have become members of Christ and children of God in Holy Baptism. God is more nearly with us than any friend can be. He knows our inmost thoughts and secret words. All spiritual life in us flows from His grace.

29. Forasmuch then as we are the offspring of God, we ought not to think that the Godhead is like unto gold, or silver, or stone, graven by art and man's device.

Here is a third truth about God. He is a Spirit. It was a dreadful mistake to think that beautiful statues were really figures of God. He is in every place. He is Love and Light, and is manifested only to the inward eye. He has no bodily form as men have. Let us take care not to put any creature in His place, for He is a jealous God, and will not have hearts stolen from Himself.

30. And the times of this ignorance God winked at; but now commandeth all men every where to repent:

Fourthly, he told them, God now calls the world to repentance by sending the message of the Gospel. The days of darkness are over, and the true Light now shines. The same God Who is our

Creator and Preserver, and claims our service, has now become manifest to men in the revelation of Jesus Christ. It would be grievous for us if we lived like men in days of heathen ignorance, and shut our ears to the loud call to repent which God has made to us.

31. Because he hath appointed a day, in the which he will judge the world in righteousness by that man whom he hath ordained; whereof he hath given assurance unto all men, in that he hath raised him from the dead.

Lastly, and this is the fifth truth about God which the apostle uttered in this speech, God is about to judge the world. His Son, Who was raised from the dead and is our Divine Lord and King, will summon all men before Him and take account of their lives. Lord, when Thou comest to judgment have mercy upon me. My righteousness is unfit to stand in that day. I fly for refuge to Thy mercy. I cling to Thy Death and Resurrection as a pledge that Thou art my Saviour as well as my Judge.

32. ¶ And when they heard of the resurrection of the dead, some mocked: and others said, We will hear thee again of this matter.

If words so Divine and eloquent found such usage as this, shall we be impatient when our poor advice is slighted? The world is still full of these two sorts of hearers, some who scoff, and others who put off attending. We know well the ridicule with which some men treat religion, and the lazy indifference that others bring to the subject. Perhaps we who read this may have dealt so with God's Word in the days gone by.

33. So Paul departed from among them.

So occasions pass. God's saints pass away from us before we have laid to heart their words and examples; opportunities of good go by. We may observe that in this city, where learning and ability abounded, the Gospel was not well received at first. We who are simple persons, and have to do with hard work and common duties, have less hindrance in our approach to Christ Jesus than these wise men found.

34. Howbeit certain men clave unto him, and believed: among the which was Dionysius the Areopagite, and a woman named Damaris, and others with them.

How great Athens must have despised this feeble Church! They were few in number, and, except one or two, quite unknown to fame. Yet there alone God was truly known, the way to heaven taught, the best wisdom learnt. Baptism and Holy Communion, that were administered in that small congregation, had depths of mystery and gifts of love that philosophers could never get hold of.

CHAPTER XVIII.

3. **Paul laboureth with his hands, and preacheth at Corinth to the Gentiles.**
 9. The Lord encourageth him in a vision. 12. He is accused before Gallio the deputy, but is dismissed. 18. Afterwards passing from city to city he strengtheneth the disciples. 24. Apollos, being more perfectly instructed by Aquila and Priscilla, 28. preacheth Christ with great efficacy.

AFTER these things Paul departed from Athens, and came to Corinth;

Corinth was a busy trading town situated between the two seas. S. Paul, who had made few converts in learned Athens, was to make many in busy Corinth. He laid aside excellency of speech and wisdom when he came there. Nay, he was "in weakness, and fear, and much trembling," but God wrought marvels by his means. The sense of his own weakness for so great a task made him rely wholly on God's almighty power.

2. *And found a certain Jew named Aquila, born in Pontus, lately come from Italy, with his wife Priscilla; (because that Claudius had commanded all Jews to depart from Rome:) and came unto them.*

Aquila and Priscilla must have suffered when they had to leave their home in the great city, and were driven out with haste and disgrace, but God had provided abundant compensation for them in S. Paul's company. Often He makes for us among strangers a spiritual home where we enjoy His Word, His Presence, the companionship of His people. He makes up to us for what we have lost. In every place His mercy is with us.

3. *And because he was of the same craft, he abode with them, and wrought: for by their occupation they were tentmakers.*

While he wrought at tent-making his mind was busy with his converts. He found time while at Corinth to write his two Epistles to the Thessalonians. There we see what he was thinking of, what his joys and sorrows were. He prepared also those addresses about Christ Crucified which went home to the hearts of numbers of Corinthians; indeed they were "not many wise, not many mighty, not many noble" who listened to him, but they were Christ's redeemed men and women, fit to praise and love God. How wonderful is the union in S. Paul of a humble outside with a great wealth of love and power within! By whose strength did he do what he did?

4. And he reasoned in the synagogue every sabbath, and persuaded the Jews and the Greeks. 5. And when Silas and Timotheus were come from Macedonia, Paul was pressed in the spirit, and testified to the Jews that Jesus was Christ.

His friends' words of encouragement, and the news they brought of the progress of Christ's Gospel, and of its wonderful fruits among the Macedonian Christians, filled this great missionary's soul with impatience. He could not bear that the Jews should explain away the life and work of Jesus Christ. He was weary of proving to their careless ears how the lights and shadows of the Old Testament, its types and yearnings, all came true in our dear Lord. What blindness theirs was not to feel this!

6. And when they opposed themselves, and blasphemed, he shook his raiment, and said unto them, Your blood be upon your own heads; I am clean: from henceforth I will go unto the Gentiles.

Perhaps just at this time he was writing 1 Thess. ii. 15, 16, in which he speaks bitterly of the falling away of the Jews, how they had themselves killed the Lord Jesus, and now were standing in the way of all men's salvation. Divine wrath, he says, has come on them to the uttermost. Lord, I now believe, I pray, I am Thy child, let me not fall away from Thee and become only a terrible example of reprobation. Let Thy glory be magnified in my salvation, not in my destruction. If I have so far not profited by Christian teaching, yet let it not be removed from me.

7. ¶ And he departed thence, and entered into a certain man's house, named Justus, one that worshipped God, whose house joined hard to the synagogue.

His purpose in ceasing to reside with Jews, and taking up his abode at the house of Justus, was that he might be more accessible to Gentiles. He wished them to come in freely and learn from him the way of life, which they would not have done when he was staying with Jews. Yet we must not think he threw over those Jews who believed. His love was not so changeable as that. He never forgot Aquila's and Priscilla's kindness (Rom. xvi. 3, 4). He always longed to help his own countrymen; for their sake he begged alms, observed ceremonies, reasoned by word and writing.

8. And Crispus, the chief ruler of the synagogue, believed on the Lord with all his house; and many of the Corinthians hearing believed, and were baptized.

If you want to know more about these Corinthian Christians read the two epistles which S. Paul wrote to them three or four years after this time. There you will see their faults as well as their

good qualities. They were tempted to deadly sin and to idolatry. They were inclined to be conceited, they made parties, they forgot what they had been taught. Yes, they were very much like us, and their temptations, their trials, their errors serve for our instruction.

9. *Then spake the Lord to Paul in the night by a vision, Be not afraid, but speak, and hold not thy peace:*

Christ, Who knows the hearts of all men, saw His servant's need of encouragement. We are not forsaken even when we seem most alone. Divine mercy stands by us and helps us through agony of body or distress of mind. This vision is just like our Lord in the old days standing by the boat when it was tossed by the storm, and saying, "It is I, be not afraid."

10. *For I am with thee, and no man shall set on thee to hurt thee: for I have much people in this city.*

The all-seeing Eye discerned in that great and wealthy city numbers waiting for the Gospel. They were Christ's people, though they knew Him not as yet. The Divine Shepherd was about to seek them out and bring them into the fold. Each had his own sins, his own cares, his own perplexities, but was about, O great joy and mercy, to find in Christ Jesus that help which he needed. The fountain was open, the supper was prepared, the bread of life offered; so it is in our own day.

11. *And he continued there a year and six months, teaching the word of God among them.*

We can gather up many fragments of S. Paul's doings during this time by studying the two Epistles to the Corinthians, where he refers to his teaching among them. For instance, he showed them how to celebrate the blessed Sacrament, and explained its meaning (1 Cor. xi. 23). He related to them in detail our Lord's Passion and Resurrection, and who saw Him after He was risen (1 Cor. xv. 3-6). Meanwhile he suffered trials and wrought marvels (2 Cor. xii. 12). In all this he still lives and teaches for our profit.

12. ¶ *And when Gallio was the deputy of Achaia, the Jews made insurrection with one accord against Paul, and brought him to the judgment seat, 13. saying, This fellow persuadeth men to worship God contrary to the law.*

How contrary to the law? Does not the Gospel treat the law with reverence? Did not Jesus our Saviour Himself observe it? Were not Christians still devout worshippers in the synagogue? Yes, but these Jews saw that the news of our Lord's atoning Death would dispense men from sacrificing bullocks and goats, would break down the barriers and let all nations into the Church, would

build up a new universal society of believers instead of the Jewish nation. They did not understand how all this was part of God's purpose. He meant the Jewish law now to give way to something better.

14. And when Paul was now about to open his mouth, Gallio said unto the Jews, If it were a matter of wrong or wicked lewdness, O ye Jews, reason would that I should bear with you :

This is a judge's business. He should be patient to listen to tales of wrong, diligent in finding out the truth, courageous to punish offenders. Gallio knew well what his duty would have been if the apostle had been charged with any act of violence or fraud. He would have gone into the case and done justice. May those who administer the law, and are gods (in a manner) to us, be guided from above to perform this great work rightly. Every day they sit to dispense justice and help to put this crooked world straight.

15. But if it be a question of words and names, and of your law, look ye to it ; for I will be no judge of such matters. 16. And he drove them from the judgment seat.

Gallio was quite right not to lend himself to the Jews' hatred against the apostle, yet he saw only a very little way into the Gospel. S. Paul's teaching seemed to him a parcel of rubbish, uninteresting, and not his business; it was all words, and names, and Jewish arguments. Lord, give us the sense that Gallio lacked; make us feel that matters between us and Thee are of the utmost weight. Our peace and eternal state depend on them.

17. Then all the Greeks took Sosthenes, the chief ruler of the synagogue, and beat him before the judgment seat. And Gallio cared for none of those things.

The proconsul Gallio was of high rank and dignity, he was good-natured and popular. S. Paul and his teaching appeared contemptible in his sight. So he turned away to the business or pleasure of the hour, and thought no more of the circumstance. Dear Lord, open our eyes that we may care; waken us, if it please Thee, even roughly, that we may hearken to Thy messengers, and see where we stand with Thee. If many great and successful persons pass by carelessly, let us not join their number.

18. ¶ And Paul after this tarried there yet a good while, and then took his leave of the brethren, and sailed thence into Syria, and with him Priscilla and Aquila ; having shorn his head in Cenchrea : for he had a vow.

When going into Judea he became as a Jew, and conformed to their ways. On occasion of deliverance from some danger he had made a vow, as religious Jews used to do, that he would offer a certain

sacrifice at Jerusalem, and meanwhile let his hair grow for a certain time. He observed such customs out of charity, not from necessity, but he wished his Jewish friends who were Christians to feel that his heart and theirs were one.

19. *And he came to Ephesus, and left them there: but he himself entered into the synagogue, and reasoned with the Jews.*
20. *When they desired him to tarry longer time with them, he consented not; 21. but bade them farewell, saying, I must by all means keep this feast that cometh in Jerusalem: but I will return again unto you, if God will. And he sailed from Ephesus.*

"If God will, we shall live and do this or that." Such a clause is not merely a respectful form, but it expresses that God is the Supreme Disposer of our lives. We are not in the hands of blind chance, but of a merciful Father Who orders all the changes and chances of this mortal life. If God will, I shall return again, I shall see my dear friends and rejoice in their society; yet I lay all this in His hands; no ill can happen to me if I remain His.

22. *And when he had landed at Cæsarea, and gone up, and saluted the church, he went down to Antioch.*

When Paul went up to the Holy City, he felt not only as a Jew who viewed it as the home of God's true worship, but as a Christian visiting that place where his dear Lord had taught, and died, and risen again. Yet it was not the place for him to stay in; his work lay elsewhere. He just snatched some hours of prayer in the temple, some kind words with the Jewish Christians, and then he was off again continuing his unwearied labours and dangers.

23. *And after he had spent some time there, he departed, and went over all the country of Galatia and Phrygia in order, strengthening all the disciples.*

This is the third great missionary journey that the apostle took. He began it by going round among his old converts in Asia Minor, strengthening them by words, and by prayers, and by means of grace, against the temptations which he saw were approaching. Christ's disciples are indeed weak in themselves, they have a hard fight at times, but their unseen Lord mercifully sends them gifts of strength through their brethren's means. To know our own weakness is the first step to receiving strength from above.

24. ¶ *And a certain Jew named Apollos, born at Alexandria, an eloquent man, and mighty in the scriptures, came to Ephesus. 25. This man was instructed in the way of the Lord; and being fervent in the spirit, he spake and taught diligently the things of the Lord, knowing only the baptism of John.*

How much he had still to learn, and yet he made excellent use of what he knew already ! Apollos was but half a Christian ; he knew something of Christ's Life and Death, but nothing of the Catholic Church or the Sacraments of the Gospel. All his Scripture learning could not supply the lack of that. He is an example to us to use what gifts we have, to serve God with all our power, and He will give us more light and enable us to serve Him better. Teach us, Lord, to recognise our own deficiencies and yet to press forward, knowing that working hours will soon be over.

26. And he began to speak boldly in the synagogue : whom when Aquila and Priscilla had heard, they took him unto them, and expounded unto him the way of God more perfectly.

God's Providence had brought Apollos from Alexandria, Aquila and Priscilla from Rome ; the one was learned and eloquent, the others poor exiles, busy at a trade. Who would have thought that the former had been brought all that way to learn Divine truth at the hands of the latter ? Remember, God's Spirit teaches us in ways beyond our expectation. What seems a chance word, or meeting, or journey may be blessed to our great good. Let us only carry with us a humble, teachable spirit.

27. And when he was disposed to pass into Achaia, the brethren wrote, exhorting the disciples to receive him : who, when he was come, helped them much which had believed through grace :

God has work suitable for each one to do. S. Paul's gift was to convert heathens and lay the foundations of faith. Apollos was better able to help those who had believed already. Oh that we could each discern the right task for us to do ! How many servants God has, and yet there is room for many more to serve Him ! That great Lord has an infinite number of duties ready for us, and also infinite helps and rewards.

28. For he mightily convinced the Jews, and that publickly, shewing by the scriptures that Jesus was Christ.

Scripture knowledge turns to profit if used to lead men to Christ. I fear some people's knowledge of the Bible is rather of the head than of the heart ; they become familiar with words or facts, but neglect that gracious Lord to Whom the whole points. How the old saints whom we read of in Scripture longed to know what we know, to see truth and righteousness displayed as it is in Christ's life, mercy as we see it in His Death, Divine power as in His rising again !

CHAPTER XIX.

6. The Holy Ghost is given by Paul's hands. 9. The Jews blaspheme his doctrine, which is confirmed by miracles. 13. The Jewish exorcists are beaten by the devil. 19. Conjuring books are burnt. 24. Demetrius, for love of gain, raiseth an uproar against Paul, 35. which is appeased by the townclerk.

AND it came to pass, that, while Apollos was at Corinth, Paul having passed through the upper coasts came to Ephesus : and finding certain disciples,

The earlier chapters of the Acts speak of the Gospel as planted in the great city of Jerusalem, then some further chapters trace its progress in the great city of Antioch ; here we come to a third great city where it also wrought marvels. Lord, look down upon our towns in this present day. Multiply the number of those who serve Thee there amidst the smoke and din ; increase their graces, give them courage to stand up for Thee. As business, and pleasure, and wickedness are all stronger in great cities, so let Thy grace be mighty too.

2. *He said unto them, Have ye received the Holy Ghost since ye believed ? And they said unto him, We have not so much as heard whether there be any Holy Ghost.*

Then they plainly could not be Christians. They did not know of the joy, the strength, the self-control which marked the Holy Spirit's presence in the heart, any more than of His outward gifts which then came as a token of the inward. They had received a baptism, and some instruction ; but there was no power in it, they were but imperfect, half-taught believers, yet longing to know and receive more.

3. *And he said unto them, Unto what then were ye baptized ? And they said, Unto John's baptism. 4. Then said Paul, John verily baptized with the baptism of repentance, saying unto the people, that they should believe on him which should come after him, that is, on Christ Jesus.*

John's baptism was one of repentance and of preparation. He could not bring men into the kingdom, though he bade them get ready for it. Let us not remain all our lives seeking without finding. To keep from open sin, to have a good reputation for uprightness, is but a poor and empty work in itself, till God fills our hearts with love and faith, and a sense of His mercy ; thus we pass from being disciples of the Baptist into full communion with the Three Blessed Persons of the Holy Trinity.

5. When they heard this, they were baptized in the name of the Lord Jesus.

But the baptism of the Catholic Church, whereby we entered into Christ's fold, has always been administered as our Lord bade, in the Name of the Father, and the Son, and the Holy Ghost. Yes, so no doubt it was here. These disciples were baptized into the profession of, the Church of, the Lord Jesus. The saving Name of Jesus means often His Church and His Faith, rather than an actual formula of words. They took Christ as their Master, were signed with His Cross, prayed to Him. All this was to take His Name on them.

6. And when Paul had laid his hands upon them, the Holy Ghost came on them; and they spake with tongues, and prophesied. 7. And all the men were about twelve.

If miraculous gifts have ceased, yet true and lasting fruits of the Spirit remain. We cry out at Confirmation, and in Ordination, and whenever our hearts seem dark and cold—

“Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire.”

We do not ask for the power to work marvels, but for some of the joy, the peace, the strength that God's Spirit brings.

8. And he went into the synagogue, and spake boldly for the space of three months, disputing and persuading the things concerning the kingdom of God.

S. Paul set to work first where a foundation had been laid of faith in the one true God and knowledge of His Holy Word. There he sought to build up the doctrine of Christ's kingdom, spoke of the Divine King, His laws, His ordinances, His glorious rewards. How great a kingdom this is, though invisible! how much it concerns us to be within it and enjoy its benefits!

9. But when divers were hardened, and believed not, but spake evil of that way before the multitude, he departed from them, and separated the disciples, disputing daily in the school of one Tyrannus.

So the Word of God in this city passed from His ancient nation and took root in the Gentile world. Henceforward His former Church was no more His, its day of visitation was gone, though many individuals from it still listened and believed one by one. Those who had loved to learn of a Christ to come, and found in the Lord Jesus all that their souls longed for, had now to stand out and profess their faith. God grant us courage to do the like when our hour of trial comes.

10. And this continued by the space of two years; so that

all they which dwelt in Asia heard the word of the Lord Jesus, both Jews and Greeks.

Some years after this we hear of the seven Churches of Asia. God sent a message to them by the apostle S. John in the Revelation. This verse tells us of the time when those Churches were first founded. They were happy, no doubt, in enjoying the teaching of the two great apostles, first of S. Paul, then of S. John. God provided for their spiritual needs by these two inspired guides. We, by studying the writings that those two apostles left, can be in the same position as the Christians of Asia. Both S. Paul and S. John have spoken to us divinely of God's righteousness, and also of His love.

11. And God wrought special miracles by the hands of Paul : 12. so that from his body were brought unto the sick handkerchiefs or aprons, and the diseases departed from them, and the evil spirits went out of them.

This great outpouring of miraculous power came upon S. Paul in that place where heathen magic and various arts abounded. God overthrew the supernatural powers of the evil one with greater marvels of His own, marvels, too, all of love and healing, and which remind us much of the works wrought by the Lord Jesus while on earth. We cannot understand how they were wrought, but we thankfully accept them and bless the Giver. All mercy, whether in nature or above nature, tells us of His goodness.

13. ¶ Then certain of the vagabond Jews, exorcists, took upon them to call over them which had evil spirits the name of the Lord Jesus, saying, We adjure you by Jesus whom Paul preacheth. 14. And there were seven sons of one Sceva, a Jew, and chief of the priests, which did so.

Let us use the holy Name of Jesus with faith, pronounce it reverently, open heaven's doors with it in our prayers. It is the Name of One Who loves us and died for us. To speak of religion, even to admire it and profess it, would be of no profit unless we ourselves experienced its power. It is not only the Jesus Whom sermons tell of, but the Divine Saviour and Friend Whom we have come to know and trust in, that can be our strength against the enemy.

15. And the evil spirit answered and said, Jesus I know, and Paul I know ; but who are ye ?

If we entered the ministry for worldly motives, if we live in it without prayer, if we try to perform sacred acts without inward communion with the Lord and His saints, the same retort may be made to us. How can we cast out evil from other hearts unless the Holy Spirit of God dwells in our own ? I confess with shame

that I have often attempted to minister to others while my own heart has been cold. Can I wonder that the evil in them has resisted my feeble efforts?

16. And the man in whom the evil spirit was leaped on them, and overcame them, and prevailed against them, so that they fled out of that house naked and wounded.

This strange, awful power of Satan is fearful even to read of. Can we ever see the like now? Not perhaps in exactly the same form, but yet it appears in frightful cruelty, in uncleanness, in a mad love for drink, in a preference of sin and misery to an honest life. Satan's power weighs down the world and defies the remedies which philosophers offer. Only a living faith can wrestle with it.

17. And this was known to all the Jews and Greeks also dwelling at Ephesus; and fear fell on them all, and the name of the Lord Jesus was magnified.

Evil is thus turned to good. Satan's power is used to advance reverence for Christ's holy Name. Shall we not one day discern better than now how all the evil there is has been permitted for righteous ends, and to magnify God? God knows how to turn all things to the glory of His Name, and the profit of His faithful servants. Let our fear, when any terrible things happen, be a salutary fear that leads us to faith and hope.

18. And many that believed came, and confessed, and shewed their deeds.

Lord, Who knowest the hearts of all men, dispose us to take shame for our own sins. Let us be ready to confess them to Thee, and, where need is, to our brethren also. There is laid up in Christ's Church a store of pardon for all sinners who truly repent. When any weighty matter presses on our consciences the Church invites us to make a special confession of it, and seek a special assurance of pardon. May God guide all of us who need it to this blessed and salutary humiliation.

19. Many of them also which used curious arts brought their books together, and burned them before all men: and they counted the price of them, and found it fifty thousand pieces of silver.

How much harm evil books do! God help us to give them up, never look into them, destroy them if they are our own. Our hearts are like tinder, and evil books soon light up in them a flame of evil desires. Instead of these hateful books which were all consumed though so costly and so numerous, God soon provided for the Christians at Ephesus a store of precious reading in S. Paul's and S. John's writings. These grow always more and more precious as they become better known.

20. So mightily grew the word of God and prevailed.

Ah, let us look at these conquests. They are not so grand as the world's victories, but they are won for lasting peace and true gain. When blasphemy, and filth, and drunkenness have had to give way before the Spirit of God, there is cause for angels to rejoice. Let our prayers and work help on the conquests of our King.

21. ¶ After these things were ended, Paul purposed in the spirit, when he had passed through Macedonia and Achaia, to go to Jerusalem, saying, After I have been there, I must also see Rome.

He did not want to see the sights of the imperial city, all its grandeur did not attract him, but he had to plead for his Master there, and God approved his purpose (xxiii. 11), assuring him that it should be fulfilled. Before he reached Rome many dangers and sufferings awaited him, but he knew that he would not be forsaken, come what might. Oh for something of that missionary spirit which led the saints to plan such journeys! The whole world, bright and glorious, and busy and wonderful as it is, appeared to them only as a place where souls might learn to know and love God.

22. So he sent into Macedonia two of them that ministered unto him, Timotheus and Erastus; but he himself stayed in Asia for a season.

S. Paul had many helpers whom he was training for the ministry, and he employed himself in converting heathens and Jews, and in warning and guiding individual souls, and he also was writing the First Epistle to the Corinthians, which was sent off about this time. How many deep reasonings and Divine warnings that Epistle has in it! And besides all this he found time to work for his own living. Teach us, Lord, how to spend our time carefully; let us be so watchful over it that we may turn every moment to good account. The saints never wasted a moment, and thus they contrived to get through so much work for God.

23. And the same time there arose no small stir about that way.

Many stirs have arisen about the Lord's way. It is, as He Himself said, like a sword, or like a fire, it penetrates between man and man, it separates one member of a family from another, it goes against our worldly ease or gain. Do not be surprised if strife is still to be found where the Gospel enters, rather bless God for rousing us from our treacherous slumber.

24. For a certain man named Demetrius, a silversmith, which made silver shrines for Diana, brought no small gain unto the craftsmen; 25. whom he called together with the work-

men of like occupation, and said, Sirs, ye know that by this craft we have our wealth.

All he thought of was this, The Gospel touches our pockets, therefore away with it ! Nowadays there are many who make gain by dishonest speculations, or by tempting men and women to drunkenness, or by giving light weight and short measure, or by some other sinful ways. They dare not look into their conscience and see how their account stands with God. All they care for is to make large profits in this world. We need to look further, and see where true wealth comes from, and where our lasting treasure must be stored.

26. Moreover ye see and hear, that not alone at Ephesus, but almost throughout all Asia, this Paul hath persuaded and turned away much people, saying that they be no gods, which are made with hands :

What a glorious work ! God's Spirit must have indeed directed the apostle's tongue to enable him to persuade so many what God's true nature is. May we overthrow our own idols, and worship the Lord Jesus in spirit and truth. He is God near to us, and dwelling with us, yet one with the Eternal Father of all.

27. So that not only this our craft is in danger to be set at nought; but also that the temple of the great goddess Diana should be despised, and her magnificence should be destroyed, whom all Asia and the world worshippeth.

Let us learn to go against all the world, when need is. The glorious temple of the goddess, and her splendid worship, which had gone on for centuries and was practised throughout the world, was poor and empty, nay, foul compared with Christian service. What was Diana's magnificence compared to the prayer of one true heart that trusts in God's mercy ?

28. And when they heard these sayings, they were full of wrath, and cried out, saying, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

Zeal for their false god united them in this way. Much more should the servants of the true God say, "This God is ours for ever and ever." Indeed His cause is not to be upheld by wrath or violence, but we should rejoice when His Name is honoured, grieve when He is despised. That idol could not reward or help her worshippers, but our Master beholds and rewards all true devotion to Him.

29. And the whole city was filled with confusion : and having caught Gaius and Aristarchus, men of Macedonia, Paul's companions in travel, they rushed with one accord into the theatre.

What did S. Paul's friends feel in this sudden danger ? Perhaps they

had no time to speak, no chance to defend themselves ; they were hurried off amidst blows and revilings, and expected each moment to be their last. Still, they could not have been the apostle's friends so long without having learnt from him to trust themselves in God's hands. He had taught them that all things work together for good, that Christ the Lord never forsakes His soldiers, and that when death comes it may be "far better."

30. And when Paul would have entered in unto the people, the disciples suffered him not. 31. And certain of the chief of Asia, which were his friends, sent unto him, desiring him that he would not adventure himself into the theatre.

The apostle longed to help his comrades out of this danger, and to speak a word for his Master to such an audience ; but he listened humbly to the advice of his friends, both Christians and heathen. They joined in entreating him to remain at home. All he could do was to help with his prayers. So he waited in concealment, listening for news, and praying that God would overrule men's passions to His glory.

32. Some therefore cried one thing, and some another : for the assembly was confused ; and the more part knew not wherefore they were come together.

We who have always led quiet lives can scarcely imagine the fury of a mob, the unreasoning passion that seizes on every soul and defies all reason, all persuasion. If we had to face such a scene, how would our faith stand ? could we quietly and openly profess our faith when all men raved against it ? Ah, it needs the discipline of many lonely hours, many prayers, and much patience, to exercise such courage as that.

33. And they drew Alexander out of the multitude, the Jews putting him forward. And Alexander beckoned with the hand, and would have made his defence unto the people. 34. But when they knew that he was a Jew, all with one voice about the space of two hours cried out, Great is Diana of the Ephesians.

This Alexander may have been that Alexander the coppersmith (2 Tim. iv. 14) who did S. Paul so much evil, at any rate he was a Jew who longed to show that the cause of the Christians was not theirs, and that they were not responsible for S. Paul's sermons and conversions. These Jews' hatred for idols was quite swallowed up in their abhorrence of the Gospel. Grant me, when God's saints are spoken against, a heart to stand up for them, not to shrink away or to join their persecutors. Let me be on God's side, even though it seems the weaker.

35. And when the townclerk had appeased the people, he said, Ye men of Ephesus, what man is there that knoweth not how

that the city of the Ephesians is a worshipper of the great goddess Diana, and of the image which fell down from Jupiter?

The Ephesians gloried in being the servants of this hideous idol, and should not we delight to honour the true God and our Saviour Jesus Christ? What love and reverence can be too great for our Divine Lord when He comes among us, in a heavenly and spiritual manner, to be adored in His Holy Sacrament?

36. Seeing then that these things cannot be spoken against, ye ought to be quiet, and to do nothing rashly. 37. For ye have brought hither these men, which are neither robbers of churches, nor yet blasphemers of your goddess.

S. Paul had not reviled the goddess. He desired to plant in men's hearts such a knowledge of God, such a sense of what God's worship ought to be, as should render the whole system of idolatry a vain, empty, unsatisfying show. By preaching the true God as manifested in His dear Son Jesus Christ, he was effectually undermining the idols, because he had something better to tell of.

38. Wherefore if Demetrius, and the craftsmen which are with him, have a matter against any man, the law is open, and there are deputies: let them implead one another.

Human justice is not always right, yet it is a great instrument in God's hands for quieting this troubled world. Judges represent Him, they administer a part of His holy law. May God direct them to administer true judgment and relieve the oppressed. May He inspire wisdom and justice into the laws which they proclaim.

39. But if ye enquire any thing concerning other matters, it shall be determined in a lawful assembly. 40. For we are in danger to be called in question for this day's uproar, there being no cause whereby we may give an account of this concourse.

The Ephesians stood in awe of the Emperor; they feared his judgment on their seditious temper. May we have as great a regard for the judgment of God. How well if we remembered that account we must shortly give to our Great Master for all our foolish and sinful ways! How shall we make answer there for our words and doings?

41. And when he had thus spoken, he dismissed the assembly.

All here seems the effect of human wisdom, but God's Providence directed it. Hearts are in His hand, and He can guide men's wisdom or folly to the advancement of His kingdom. This great storm lulled as suddenly as it had risen, and the Christians at their evening prayer that day must have rejoiced in the power of their God Who had so marvellously overthrown all the forces of the enemy.

CHAPTER XX.

1. Paul goeth to Macedonia. 7. He celebrateth the Lord's supper, and preacheth. 9. Eutychus having fallen down dead, 10. is raised to life. 17. At Miletum he calleth the elders together, telleth them what shall befall to himself, 28. committeth God's flock to them, 29. warneth them of false teachers, 32. commendeth them to God, 36. prayeth with them, and goeth his way.

AND after the uproar was ceased, Paul called unto him the disciples, and embraced them, and departed for to go into Macedonia.

This was no journey of pleasure. S. Paul tells us of it in his Second Epistle to the Corinthians (ii. 12 and vii. 5). He had "no rest in his spirit;" "without were fightings, within were fears;" he was deeply anxious about his converts, yet after a while he enjoyed great comfort again, and was guided to write that wonderful Epistle which lets us see into his heart. If it is God's will that our journey should be overcast for a time, yet let us keep on the road as steadily in dark days as in light. He will send sunshine again.

2. And when he had gone over those parts, and had given them much exhortation, he came into Greece,

Many journeys, marvels, experiences, hopes and fears, are embraced in this short verse. His missionary work was drawing to an end, so God multiplied his successes more and more. He wrote the Epistle to the Romans when he got into Greece, and there he tells us of his plans (Rom. xv. 23-33). He was busy preaching the Gospel, gathering together alms for the Jewish Christians, praying, and entreating for his brethren's prayers.

3. And there abode three months. And when the Jews laid wait for him, as he was about to sail into Syria, he purposed to return through Macedonia. 4. And there accompanied him into Asia Sopater of Berea; and of the Thessalonians, Aristarchus and Secundus; and Gaius of Derbe, and Timotheus; and of Asia, Tychicus and Trophimus. 5. These going before tarried for us at Troas.

S. Paul was preparing these men to be missionaries and teachers of the Gospel. They shared in his prayers, in his charities; he taught them Christian doctrine, and employed them to teach also. It was thus that Christ our Lord Himself had trained His twelve apostles, and now the apostles in their turn were passing on the Divine light of faith into new hearts. God grant us to take pains

with individual souls ! May we teach and guide in the right way, by good example, and advice, and prayer, those souls whom He puts under our influence. What a misery it would be to feel too late that we had guided them on the wrong road !

6. And we sailed away from Philippi after the days of unleavened bread, and came unto them to Troas in five days; where we abode seven days.

The days of unleavened bread still kept their name, but they had become now the anniversary of a much greater deliverance than that from Egypt. Christ is our Passover, and we keep the season of His victory with more grateful hearts than Jews of old observed their feast. The shadow has passed into the substance. What are Pharaoh and his tyranny, and the tasks of bondage, and the waves of the Red Sea, compared to the misery, and sin, and death from which our dear Lord has freed us ?

7. And upon the first day of the week, when the disciples came together to break bread, Paul preached unto them, ready to depart on the morrow; and continued his speech until midnight.

Christians observed the first day of the week by celebration of the Holy Communion, and by hearing God's Word. These are the two means whereby our souls are nourished. We obtain thereby light, and strength, and comfort. The Bread of Life is offered to us in both. Lord, enable us to spend our Sundays rightly, grant that we may always find time on that day to praise and glorify Thee. Glory be to Thee for the precious gift of the Lord's Day. How could we otherwise find refreshment in our labours and time to hear about heaven ?

8. And there were many lights in the upper chamber, where they were gathered together.

They met at night, because there was no Sunday recognised in the world as yet. Their Jewish or heathen masters or customers would expect their services all day as usual. It was only when the day was over that they could meet for God's worship. They were delighted to give up their rest for this purpose. How they would have envied us who have our Sunday mornings free ! but yet we lack the earnest attention, the devout love and faith that they had.

9. And there sat in a window a certain young man named Eutychus, being fallen into a deep sleep: and as Paul was long preaching, he sunk down with sleep, and fell down from the third loft, and was taken up dead.

We can guess from S. Paul's Epistles what his sermons were like.

How he would speak of man's lost condition, of the need of an atoning sacrifice, of our Saviour's power and mercy, of the Christian life and its duties. What must it have been to listen to one who had been favoured by such revelations, endowed with such gifts as S. Paul was! Still Eutychus is not blamed for his drowsiness; perhaps he did his best to keep awake, perhaps he had been trying to live as a Christian lad should among the many temptations of life. It must have been even harder for a young man to be a Christian then than it is now.

10. *And Paul went down, and fell on him, and embracing him said, Trouble not yourselves; for his life is in him.*

S. Paul's whole apostolic work is represented by this action. What else was he always doing but going down to dead souls, humbling himself to their needs, pleading for them and with them, at last awakening a spark of Divine life within? He brought forth spiritual life afresh in men's hearts by his tears and prayers. As he knew that the breath had returned to this young man's body, so he had often the comfort of feeling that repentance, and faith, and love had begun to live in those souls who used to be as dead.

11: *When he therefore was come up again, and had broken bread, and eaten, and talked a long while, even till break of day, so he departed.*

What memories that night must have left with the Christians of Troas! There was the Holy Sacrament, and the apostle's Divine words, and the sudden presence of death, and the marvellous resurrection out of death. If they never met S. Paul again, or not for many years, still they must have been encouraged to look forward to that meeting where there will be no parting, that rising again of all the dead, that unbroken discourse on God's love and glory with unveiled faces.

12. *And they brought the young man alive, and were not a little comforted.*

Comforted by this fresh proof that God was with them, and that His apostle's words and acts were divinely guided; comforted too by the joy of Eutychus' friends, and by the lad's own prayers and gratitude. We cannot work marvels as S. Paul did, yet I daresay we can bring much comfort to our brethren if we lay out our life on the plan of doing good.

13. *¶ And we went before to ship, and sailed unto Assos, there intending to take in Paul: for so had he appointed, minding himself to go afoot.*

We know not why; perhaps he had some work for God to do on the road, or perhaps he desired a quiet day for thought, and needed to be alone. No doubt he found in that walk occasions to magnify

his heavenly Father, and cast himself afresh on that Divine mercy which had so marvellously sustained him up to this time.

14. And when he met with us at Assos, we took him in, and came to Mitylene. 15. And we sailed thence, and came the next day over against Chios; and the next day we arrived at Samos, and tarried at Trogyllium; and the next day we came to Miletus.

The isles of Greece have wonderful gifts of beauty, wonderful associations of art, and valour, and glories of old time. We think of their past renown and of the blighting tyranny of the Turks under which they have lain so long, and we hope for the time when God will give them new life. As the apostle passed through them he planned enterprises and conquests for Christ ; that was more in his mind than ease or recreation.

16. For Paul had determined to sail by Ephesus, because he would not spend the time in Asia : for he hasted, if it were possible for him, to be at Jerusalem the day of Pentecost.

Pentecost to Jews brought thanksgiving for the wheat harvest, and a remembrance of the giving of the Law on Sinai. Jews from all parts of the world gathered together to Jerusalem to keep it, but S. Paul remembered the Holy Spirit's descent at that season, and longed to make a new effort to spread the Gospel among the crowds who would assemble there. He sought for a new Pentecost, a fresh outpouring of love, and prayer, and spiritual life which should win over Jewish hearts to the Cross, if it were possible.

17. ¶ And from Miletus he sent to Ephesus, and called the elders of the church.

These elders or priests (for the word is the same) were the clergy of that Church of Ephesus where the apostle had lived for the previous three years. He knew how much depended on having faithful pastors ; he desired that each of those men should be a centre of truth and consolation to many. His whole soul was bent on making them feel the promises and warnings of the Gospel, so that they might themselves awaken other hearts to feel the same. How touching are the words that follow ! they must long have lived in the hearers' memory.

18. And when they were come to him, he said unto them, Ye know, from the first day that I came into Asia, after what manner I have been with you at all seasons,

May our life be thus uniform, the same indoors as without, the same on working days as on Sundays. May we be able to appeal to our brethren as witnesses of our character. Alas, how often we have been selfish, ill-tempered, lazy, irreverent, and so contradicted

the holy words we took on our lips ! Very few of us are always the same. What is the secret of a consistent life? Prayer is the best spell of all. Let us at least in times of prayer always bring the same humble, penitent, earnest dispositions, and then they will spread through the day.

19. Serving the Lord with all humility of mind, and with many tears, and temptations, which befell me by the lying in wait of the Jews :

Here are tears of sorrow and anxiety. He led a painful life, often having to suffer, often in great dangers and risks. His heavenly Master was pleased to try His servant with many afflictions, and yet his ministry gained infinitely thereby. It is our comfortable life, our easy prosperous days, that make our witness weak. This man had power by knowing what anguish of body and mind meant. When the Lord sends us sufferings, be sure He has a work for us to do in the strength of patience.

20. And how I kept back nothing that was profitable unto you, but have shewed you, and have taught you publickly, and from house to house,

What must it have been to have listened to the great apostle preaching, pleading with you the claims of Christ, and instructing in Christian duty! But then, after his sermons were done, if he had come to your house and taught you there, if he had asked to see the servants and the children, and had told them God's message also, should not we have learnt to see our true profit? All the world's advantages would have seemed as nothing in comparison with our eternal joy.

21. Testifying both to the Jews, and also to the Greeks, repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ.

These were his two chief subjects, repentance and faith. He made his friends grieve over and dread their own sins against a holy God, and yet also trust in the infinite Divine mercy of God as displayed in Christ Jesus. Here is the summary of all fruitful sermons. They must make us hate sin and love the Lord Jesus Christ. The greatness of our sins, and the exceeding power, glory, and mercy of Christ our Saviour, are old subjects, and yet ever new.

22. And now, behold, I go bound in the spirit unto Jerusalem, not knowing the things that shall befall me there : 23. save that the Holy Ghost witnesseth in every city, saying that bonds and afflictions abide me.

Does not this remind us of our Lord Himself when He "stedsfastly set His face to go to Jerusalem"? Christ the Lord knew well not only the approaching danger, but all the manner of His death,

still He journeyed onward. S. Paul must have felt that he was following in the steps of that last great journey of Christ. Lord, may we, though far off from such a model, yet after our imperfect manner prepare ourselves boldly to meet trouble. Towards the end of life afflictions and losses mostly thicken round us.

24. But none of these things move me, neither count I my life dear unto myself, so that I might finish my course with joy, and the ministry, which I have received of the Lord Jesus, to testify the gospel of the grace of God.

Life is precious because it can be used to purchase eternity, can ransom other lives, can be united to the life of the Son of God. Of itself, what is a little space of breath, a few beats of the heart, a short lease of this animated frame that is soon to return to its native dust? Life is poor and cheap of itself, but the Incarnation has transfigured it and given it glory and hope.

25. And now, behold, I know that ye all, among whom I have gone preaching the kingdom of God, shall see my face no more.

He had lived in their presence and been their personal friend for years, now all that had come to an end, and he knew not what awaited him, except that he would be no longer in that place among his converts and friends. So it is with our lives; opportunities pass, pages in life's book are turned over and fastened down, God removes from us those on whom we leant. We need to find an abiding Friend Who will never leave us nor forsake us.

26. Wherefore I take you to record this day, that I am pure from the blood of all men.

These are grave words. They mean that to refuse the Gospel is to refuse life, that souls brought face to face with Christ must either choose Him or choose ruin. How can the guilt of souls cast away rest on the unfaithful pastor unless such are in very truth cast away? Lord, open our eyes to see this great alternative; for us at least no choice remains except ungodliness or faith in Christ. Unless we take Him for our Lord evil will rule over us.

27. For I have not shunned to declare unto you all the counsel of God.

Here is the most important knowledge. Many things in earth and air, much human learning, many kinds of useful knowledge, we may miss without harm. God does not mean us to know everything, but He would have us learn His plan for our salvation. Redemption through Christ, the road to heaven, the way to pray and serve God, are lessons which all should learn.

28. ¶ Take heed therefore unto yourselves, and to all the

flock, over the which the Holy Ghost hath made you overseers, to feed the church of God, which he hath purchased with his own blood.

O Good Shepherd, Who hast bought my soul with Thy precious Blood, leave me not, I beseech Thee. Let me feel the value of each soul which has cost Thy life. What misery it would be if I led away Christ's sheep from His fold, or profaned any soul which He has bought for His own ! May that precious Blood, which is still mighty to save, wash out all my sinful stains.

29. For I know this, that after my departing shall grievous wolves enter in among you, not sparing the flock.

These wolves meant false teachers, who should upset the faith of believers, or set them an evil example. All those who would unteach the Gospel, or bid us live only for the world, are our enemies. God give us eyes to discern true shepherds, and grace to remain in the fold where His mercy has placed us.

30. Also of your own selves shall men arise, speaking perverse things, to draw away disciples after them.

What ! clergy in that apostolic time, who had known S. Paul's own teaching, and embraced the Gospel when to do so was indeed to renounce the world ! Could such persons fall away, nay, lead their brethren with them into ruin ? We ought to study God's Word with prayer, to cling to the Catholic faith and God's ordinances, to remember how God has led us so mercifully on the way. Here is sufficient grace for us to live and die with.

31. Therefore watch, and remember, that by the space of three years I ceased not to warn every one night and day with tears.

Here are tears of pastoral care. We might have withstood S. Paul's preaching and his example, but if we had seen him melt into tears at our indifference, I think we should have given in. How many times he must have come in at night and pleaded with some soul ! and when he saw his words did not prevail, the thought of eternal ruin, and of Christ's great love, and of the blessedness of repentance, became too much for him to bear ; he wept and could say no more.

32. And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified.

We have to leave our friends, we can do no more for them. Death or some heavy chance calls us away. Happy are we if we can point them to a Divine ever-present Comforter Who can do for them more than we ask or think. We believe in His truth, His love,

His power. He will not forsake His helpless ones in life's journey. Has not God brought to everlasting life many who were once as frail, as sinful, as ignorant as we are now? He turned all their perplexities into joy at last.

33. I have coveted no man's silver, or gold, or apparel.

This is a great power, to be free from covetousness. When death breathes on them, how gold, and silver, and fine clothing will all turn to dust! God enable us to set our hearts on more abiding riches. His treasure-house is full of much better things.

34. Yea, ye yourselves know, that these hands have ministered unto my necessities, and to them that were with me.

If we cannot all earn our living with our hands as the great apostle did, yet we may copy his spirit, by patiently waiting on our brethren, and giving up our time and means to do them service. Those who are poor, and work for their daily bread, follow the pattern of Christ the Lord at Nazareth, and His great apostle at Ephesus. They are honoured by such lofty patterns. Their hearts may be in heaven, while they do their work here below.

35. I have shewed you all things, how that so labouring ye ought to support the weak, and to remember the words of the Lord Jesus, how he said, It is more blessed to give than to receive.

Who else but the Lord Jesus could have said this? It is not written in any Gospel, but we recognise it as having the true ring of His Divine words. He Himself gave freely His Divine power and human love, His care, His teaching, last of all His life, to do us good, and He bids us open our hearts and find true happiness in doing as He did. Oh that the blessedness of giving might become part of our own experience! Learn, dear friends, this Divine saying, and trust Him Who cannot deceive you.

36. ¶ And when he had thus spoken, he kneeled down, and prayed with them all.

That was the best kind of farewell. The time was very short, and he put his last desires and hopes for his friends into prayers to his and their heavenly Friend. When good advice fails, and we have no more warnings to give, we can at least accompany those for whom we are anxious to the throne of grace, and tell our God what we hope and fear for them.

37. And they all wept sore, and fell on Paul's neck, and kissed him, 38. sorrowing most of all for the words which he spake, that they should see his face no more. And they accompanied him unto the ship.

Here are tears of human affection. The Gospel does not do away with love, but sanctifies it and opens to it an eternal prospect. S. Paul and his friends wept at parting, because they loved each other, and remembered many happy days, many wonderful mercies, shared together. They grieved to part, and yet knew where to turn for comfort.

CHAPTER XXI.

- 1.** Paul will not by any means be dissuaded from going to Jerusalem. 9. Philip's daughters prophetesses. 17. Paul cometh to Jerusalem: 27. where he is apprehended, and in great danger, 31. but by the chief captain is rescued, and permitted to speak to the people.

AND it came to pass, that after we were gotten from them, and had launched, we came with a straight course unto Coos, and the day following unto Rhodes, and from thence unto Patara: 2. and finding a ship sailing over unto Phenicia, we went aboard, and set forth. 3. Now when we had discovered Cyprus, we left it on the left hand, and sailed into Syria, and landed at Tyre: for there the ship was to unlade her burden.

This was a prosperous voyage, in the bright spring weather between Easter and Whitsuntide of the year A.D. 58, still there were sad leave-takings and sad forebodings. What is all this life but a voyage? Sometimes we have a straight course and fair weather, sometimes the winds are contrary. Some dear friends we keep with us for a long while, others we have to part with speedily. Before long the voyage ends and we step ashore never to return. We are happy if, like S. Paul, we carry with us the knowledge and love of God and a sure trust in His overshadowing mercy.

- 4.** And finding disciples, we tarried there seven days: who said to Paul through the Spirit, that he should not go up to Jerusalem.

These Christians at Tyre were right, and yet they were wrong: right in foreseeing S. Paul's danger, wrong in forbidding him to meet it. He compared their advice with the leading of God's Spirit in his own heart, and chose the latter. He was grateful to them for their loving anxiety, yet firm in the purpose which he had long cherished to take his offerings up to Jerusalem and worship there once more with the Jewish Christians. It was love that urged him to go and encounter whatever dangers there might be.

- 5.** And when we had accomplished those days, we departed and went our way; and they all brought us on our way, with

wives and children, till we were out of the city : and we kneeled down on the shore, and prayed. 6. And when we had taken our leave one of another, we took ship ; and they returned home again.

Even the children desired a last sight of the apostle. Their parents had brought them up to honour God's servants and delight to listen to holy teaching. Tyre in the Old Testament is a very grand place, full of all manner of wealth and splendour ; but in the New Testament it is much humbler and simpler, only now the love of Christ is there. Our Saviour had once in body come very near it (Mark vii. 24), but after His Ascension He had come there spiritually in the fulness of His blessing.

7. And when we had finished our course from Tyre, we came to Ptolemais, and saluted the brethren, and abode with them one day.

This Ptolemais is the same place that is called S. Jean d'Acre in crusading and modern history. Great armies have fought around its walls, great princes lodged within it, but it is only noticed here for the sake of the humble Christians who lived there. S. Paul found strength and comfort in their kind welcome.

8. And the next day we that were of Paul's company departed, and came unto Cesarea : and we entered into the house of Philip the evangelist, which was one of the seven ; and abode with him.

This was the Philip whom we read of in chapter viii. ; it was he who explained Isaiah liii. to the Ethiopian. He was an evangelist, which means almost the same as missionary in these days. He must have had many things to tell about S. Stephen and the early days of the Church of Christ. Think what matters he had dealt with all those years, how he had cared for the poor, explained the Scriptures, preached Christ to many souls. When our life ends, may we have some such employments to look back upon.

9. And the same man had four daughters, virgins, which did prophecy.

Philip's daughters found their calling in dedication of body and soul to God's service, and in learning and teaching heavenly things. So in these days, while we gladly acknowledge that most women are called by God to be wives and mothers, and have work in their own family, yet we cannot deny that there are some whose way God makes plain to a different life. Either in caring for the sick, or teaching, or in a retired life of prayer and study, their heavenly Father may find fit work for them.

10. And as we tarried there many days, there came down

from Judea a certain prophet, named Agabus. 11. And when he was come unto us, he took Paul's girdle, and bound his own hands and feet, and said, Thus saith the Holy Ghost, So shall the Jews at Jerusalem bind the man that owneth this girdle, and shall deliver him into the hands of the Gentiles.

So Christ our Saviour Himself had been bound and delivered to the Gentiles. This prophet foretold for S. Paul the same treatment as his Divine Master had met with ; and just as Christ the Lord had gone up to His Passion, knowing all things that should come upon Him, so S. Paul persevered with his journey none the less bravely now that he knew what would be the end of it. When trouble and death come in our path, we too may welcome the warning as sent in mercy, and yet keep on quietly doing our daily work up to the end.

12. And when we heard these things, both we, and they of that place, besought him not to go up to Jerusalem.

Their love strove with his love, they tenderly persuading, and he gratefully putting by the prayer. After all, they had him among them at Cæsarea for two years to come ; and though he was a prisoner, yet they must have had opportunities of seeing him and profiting by his company. God recompensed their love for the apostle by sending him back there again, though in an unexpected manner.

13. Then Paul answered, What mean ye to weep and to break mine heart? for I am ready not to be bound only, but also to die at Jerusalem for the name of the Lord Jesus.

S. Paul was not naturally brave. He had no inclination for chains and death, but the love of Christ constrained him. So long as he could bear witness of his Saviour, and plead for Him with sinners, he was content whatever came. Who will transfigure our weak, tender hearts with a spark of courage from on high that we may gladly endure all things, if only that holy Name be magnified ?

14. And when he would not be persuaded, we ceased, saying, The will of the Lord be done.

Let this be not only our saying, but our heartfelt prayer. Let this be the constant practice of my life, O Lord, to be pleased with all Thy choices, so that when trial or death approach, I may be prepared to submit my will to Thine. Let my heart learn to go along with my lips in this petition, "Thy will be done." Indeed sometimes it is very hard to make this prayer truly, but my Saviour, Who Himself prayed thus, will help me to follow His pattern.

15. And after those days we took up our carriages, and went up to Jerusalem.

Here we come again to the Holy City, which is dear to believers for so many sacred memories, and yet has been so profaned. Thank God, He has enlarged our Jerusalem to be the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world, and He has given us hopes of an abiding city above. Yet still we honour the

“ Dear sacred haunts of glory and of woe.”

True hearts still endeavour to trace their Saviour’s footsteps on those very scenes where He accomplished our redemption.

16. There went with us also certain of the disciples of Cæsarea, and brought with them one Mnason of Cyprus, an old disciple, with whom we should lodge.

Mnason was an old disciple. Probably he had known our Saviour and belonged to the company of His disciples. Anyhow, he had persevered for many years in his Christian profession. No temptations, no persecutions, had had power to draw him away, and now he obtained the honour of entertaining the great apostle. Though he knew S. Paul was very unpopular with the Jews, yet he welcomed him none the less heartily for that.

17. And when we were come to Jerusalem, the brethren received us gladly.

He and they were of the same nation, accustomed to the same law, and, still more, they had found the same Saviour. Perhaps they had been persecuted for their faith as S. Paul had been. These Jewish brethren were Christians, yet they still lived as Jews, worshipped in the Temple, observed the law, looked on Christ the Lord as the King and Hope of Israel. S. Paul felt as they did, and only longed to make them open their hearts freely to Gentiles and share their faith with them.

18. And the day following Paul went in with us unto James ; and all the elders were present.

It would seem that S. Paul and S. James had not met since Acts xv. 30, which must have been about eight years before. How much each must have had to ask and to tell ! The one was full of news about the Christian Church growing and increasing among the heathen ; the other must have had on his mind the great dangers which hung over the Jewish nation, and which soon ended in its utter destruction. Many sayings of Christ Himself must have come to their remembrance in which He had foretold all this.

19. And when he had saluted them, he declared particularly what things God had wrought among the Gentiles by his ministry.

Not he but God had wrought the marvels. They came not of his eloquence that persuaded, or his power that overpassed nature, or his strength that lasted out against trials, but from One much

greater Who was ever with him. He rested on the faithfulness and love of God. We shall do great things when we have come to feel our own utter nothingness, and to draw daily from the supreme Fountain of mercy. God can accomplish what man's skill fails in. Our own feebleness is too evident for us to rest on that.

20. And when they heard it, they glorified the Lord, and said unto him, Thou seest, brother, how many thousands of Jews there are which believe; and they are all zealous of the law:

Glory be to God for His work in rooting the faith so widely! Gentiles had to forsake their idols, Jews their prejudices against the Crucified One. Both alike were now brethren, yet still they had much to learn from the Holy Spirit. Let us join to our zeal a teachable heart, ready and desirous to learn God's truth, and to put that first of all.

21. And they are informed of thee, that thou teachest all the Jews which are among the Gentiles to forsake Moses, saying that they ought not to circumcise their children, neither to walk after the customs.

How dear all their customs were to the Jews! how vexed they were to think that any one should slight them! All the service which S. Paul had done to the Church of Christ, all his labours and sufferings, his words and writings, could not make up for his having countenanced neglect of the law, as they wrongly fancied that he had. Lord, fix our minds on the weighty matters of Thy Divine law. Let faith and mercy be the essentials with us. Let us not too easily blame our brethren for small matters.

22. What is it therefore? the multitude must needs come together: for they will hear that thou art come.

S. Paul was not above listening to his friends' counsel, and doing all that he could to win his countrymen. Had not he once felt zealous for the law? Did not he endeavour to gain hearts by every condescension possible? He hoped to have the opportunity in Jerusalem itself of setting forth Christ's work. When the Lord's day came he hoped to join in Holy Communion with these very brethren, and preach Christ's Divine glory and atoning Sacrifice on the very spot where He had redeemed us.

23. Do therefore this that we say to thee: We have four men which have a vow on them; 24. them take, and purify thyself with them, and be at charges with them, that they may shave their heads: and all may know that those things, whereof they were informed concerning thee, are nothing; but that thou thyself also walkest orderly, and keepest the law.

This counsel was that S. Paul should join some Christian Nazarites in keeping their vow, and should pay for the sacrifice that they needed at its conclusion, and all this in order to show that he himself held that for Jews there was nothing whatever wrong in observing the law. Observe, he was not to put aside his faith in Christ Jesus, his trust in the Atoning Blood, his communion with Gentile Christians. Only he was to condescend to the weakness of those Jews who believed in Christ, and yet suspected Paul himself of being an apostate. How shall we hit the right line of prudent compliance with others' ways, and yet steady refusal to join when they do what is wrong? Only the spirit of wisdom, won by prayer, can show us just how far to go.

25. As touching the Gentiles which believe, we have written and concluded that they observe no such thing, save only that they keep themselves from things offered to idols, and from blood, and from strangled, and from fornication.

We are free from the law altogether, yet we must submit to God's holy ordinances. To serve Him is perfect freedom. Did not the Lord of Glory Himself take the form of a servant, and submit Himself to His brethren? Our glory ought to be to give up, to submit, to humble ourselves to the weak. The way of obedience is the happiest. The Jewish law, and its precepts about meats, are now passed away, but God's holy inward law remains firm.

26. Then Paul took the men, and the next day purifying himself with them entered into the temple, to signify the accomplishment of the days of purification, until that an offering should be offered for every one of them.

It seems strange to see the great missionary apostle in the Temple attending on the sacrifices of the ancient law; yet we must not blame that spirit in which he went there. He expected no cleansing from the sacrifices, no merit from the vow; yet his heart all through turned to His Divine Master, Who had Himself submitted to the same rites. To induce men to believe in Christ Jesus he would have gone through any ceremonies. Loyalty to his Lord, that was his one guiding star.

27. And when the seven days were almost ended, the Jews which were of Asia, when they saw him in the temple, stirred up all the people, and laid hands on him, 28. crying out, Men of Israel, help: This is the man, that teacheth all men every where against the people, and the law, and this place: and further brought Greeks also into the temple, and hath polluted this holy place. 29. (For they had seen before with him in the city Trophimus an Ephesian, whom they supposed that Paul had brought into the temple.)

Here is the great peril come which the apostle and his friends had so long expected. S. Paul was in the Temple, busy performing his vow and joining in the sacrifices, when suddenly this fierce outcry was raised against him. He was accused of being a traitor, and a heretic, and a profaner of God's holy Temple. Those who loved and honoured him as their father in Christ were all far away, and he was alone amidst enemies. O Lord, if such sad experiences are in store for us, let the example of Thy saints encourage our weakness. Do Thou stand by us, if all men forsake our side.

30. And all the city was moved, and the people ran together : and they took Paul, and drew him out of the temple : and forthwith the doors were shut.

God's holy House had indeed become a den of murderers ; its doors were shut henceforth upon true worshippers of God in Christ ; its end was rapidly approaching. God's saints had in old time praised it as their holy and beautiful House where their fathers had served God, but now the whole earth was consecrated by Christ's Blood to be a spiritual temple where the Catholic Church can offer up spiritual sacrifices. Instead of the gold and splendour of the ancient Temple, God accepts repentance, faith, and love, which are far more precious.

31. And as they went about to kill him, tidings came unto the chief captain of the band, that all Jerusalem was in an uproar. 32. Who immediately took soldiers and centurions, and ran down unto them : and when they saw the chief captain and the soldiers, they left beating of Paul.

The hour of S. Paul's sacrifice was not yet come. Once more he was rescued out of the very jaws of death ; once more his life was given back to him to use for his Master's service. When death really came to him he must have been ready to meet it, he had so often been on the very verge of dying, so often felt that all this world was nothing now. Even amidst blows and revilings we may be sure that he remembered Christ's own Passion, and offered all his own sufferings in union with that only true Sacrifice.

33. Then the chief captain came near, and took him, and commanded him to be bound with two chains ; and demanded who he was, and what he had done.

Here is the apostle bound and delivered into the hands of the Gentiles, according to the prophecy of verse 11 ; yet the Word of God was not bound. His very captivity enabled him to win many hearts whom he could not have reached otherwise. Soon he manifested who he was and what was his work by preaching Christ in his bonds. He who had sanctified the traveller's, and artisan's, and pastor's lives, was now to have a long spell of the prisoner's life too, and show forth God's glory in that.

34. And some cried one thing, some another, among the multitude: and when he could not know the certainty for the tumult, he commanded him to be carried into the castle.

Is a believer really all alone when friends forsake and enemies revile? Is there no refuge for those whose trust is in God only? The strong walls of the castle made a shelter for S. Paul, but he knew of one much more secure.

“Thou, Saviour, art his charmed bower,
His magic ring, his rock, his tower.”

35. And when he came upon the stairs, so it was, that he was borne of the soldiers for the violence of the people. 36. For the multitude of the people followed after, crying, Away with him.

How this reminds us of the cries, “Crucify Him, crucify Him,” which had been once heard in that very city! Is it not strange that the Divine Lord of all, and that His most holy and trusted servant, should each in turn be treated as outcasts and criminals too bad to live? Such a fact should give us a deep distrust of human judgment. Men have sometimes been so outrageously wrong in their estimate of men.

37. And as Paul was to be led into the castle, he said unto the chief captain, May I speak unto thee? Who said, Canst thou speak Greek? 38. Art not thou that Egyptian, which before these days madest an uproar, and leddest out into the wilderness four thousand men that were murderers?

How marvellously Christ our Lord and His apostles kept from anything that could excite the passions of their unruly countrymen! There were numbers, like the followers of this Egyptian, who were driven wild by oppression and ready to take any opportunity of rebelling. They thought the Messiah’s kingdom meant a revolt, freedom for Israelites, death to oppressors. The Gospel plan of reform was quite different. That began from within, dwelt on love and duty; it mended the world’s wrongs by patience.

39. But Paul said, I am a man which am a Jew of Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city: and, I beseech thee, suffer me to speak unto the people.

Indeed it came true, as our Lord had said, that God’s Spirit would inspire His people with words to speak in the hour of trial. Here was the apostle wounded and breathless, scarcely dragged out of murderous hands, and with so many voices clamouring for his life, yet how patiently, how firmly, how courteously he behaves, how he uses all means to recommend his cause! Lord, teach us the secret of such calmness when troubles come.

40. And when he had given him licence, Paul stood on the stairs, and beckoned with the hand unto the people. And when there was made a great silence, he spake unto them in the Hebrew tongue, saying,

Saying the truth about his conversion, and yet with such care for his hearers' prejudices, such a Jewish heart, such forbearance, that his hearers might know he had once felt as they did, and so be drawn onwards to share his faith. Here was the opportunity he had prayed for of setting forth Christ to his countrymen. How suddenly and how strangely it had come! but prayer enabled him to be always ready.

CHAPTER XXII.

1. Paul declareth at large, how he was converted to the faith, 17. and called to his apostleship. 22. At the very mentioning of the Gentiles, the people exclaim on him. 24. He should have been scourged, 25. but claiming the privilege of a Roman, he escapeth.

MEN, brethren, and fathers, hear ye my defence which I make now unto you.

Let us listen also. We are not indeed enemies of the great apostle, yet we are deeply interested in his sincerity. Our faith is so much built upon his preaching that we ought to study his conversion, observe what caused it, how it came about, how it is a type of our own. We have to follow his example, and turn, as he did, from unbelief to faith, from hatred to love.

2. (And when they heard that he spake in the Hebrew tongue to them, they kept the more silence: and he saith,) 3. I am verily a man which am a Jew, born in Tarsus, a city in Cilicia, yet brought up in this city at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught according to the perfect manner of the law of the fathers, and was zealous toward God, as ye all are this day.

Observe in what manner God prepared His servant for the work he was to do. All unknowingly, when Paul came to Jerusalem as a lad, when he listened to Gamaliel, when he rejoiced to understand the wisdom of the Pharisees, he was preparing for that day when all these things should seem as nothing in his eyes. He had Jewish privileges in their full measure, so that he might appreciate something better.

4. And I persecuted this way unto the death, binding and delivering into prisons both men and women.

Ah, what sorrows their Christian profession brought on these souls! Yet no doubt Jesus Christ was with them in their sufferings. He helped them to bear, and they were upheld most of all when they heard that their chief enemy had now been brought to believe, and love, and hope as they did. Lord, if we have to put up with anything for Thy Name's sake, let us endure so patiently and bravely that we may at last win scoffers to join in the same blessed hope which is ours.

5. As also the high priest doth bear me witness, and all the estate of the elders: from whom also I received letters unto the brethren, and went to Damascus, to bring them which were there bound unto Jerusalem, for to be punished.

A different sort of journey from those in his later life. Now he was himself on the side of the persecuted, he was himself bound and expecting to be punished, he had thrown in his lot with the afflicted and suffering. Grant us, O Lord, to be on the side of Thy people, to get free from blasphemers and doubters, and to join with those, however poor and humble they be, who love Thy Name. What if great and mighty ones are against us, yet we know in Whom we have believed.

6. And it came to pass, that, as I made my journey, and was come nigh unto Damascus about noon, suddenly there shone from heaven a great light round about me.

When that light shines on us the world becomes darkened. Before, it all lay so smiling and so bright, it seemed like our lasting home and unfailing treasure.

"But when Thy keener, purer beam
Is poured upon the sight,
Earth loses all its power to charm,
And what was day is night."

7. And I fell unto the ground, and heard a voice saying unto me, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me?

When that hand arrests us in our way, when that voice speaks to our hearts, then all the power, all the noise of this world seem as nothing. May we never push away the Divine hand or close our ears against the voice. We are brought face to face with God. He bids us reflect upon our life, and think Whom we have been resisting. He makes us consider our ways.

8. And I answered, Who art thou, Lord? And he said unto me, I am Jesus of Nazareth, whom thou persecutest.

It is all from above. The Good Shepherd finds His lost sheep. Divine grace and mercy looks upon our souls and recalls us back from wandering. Thanks be to God for His sovereign grace, which

calls from above, which overrules our frailty, and lifts us up towards heaven. It is not human prudence nor fancy that has made us change, but our Saviour's infinite mercy.

9. And they that were with me saw indeed the light, and were afraid ; but they heard not the voice of him that spake to me.

God does not waste His miracles. The heavenly vision and articulate words of Jesus Christ were for S. Paul only. His brethren were to be converted afterwards by him. God trusted them in his hands. We are not allowed in our day to see miraculous wonders, but we see their fruits in the lives of believers, we hear Divine words through human tongues. God has not forgotten us, even though He does not convert us by marvels above nature.

10. And I said, What shall I do, Lord ? And the Lord said unto me, Arise, and go into Damascus ; and there it shall be told thee of all things which are appointed for thee to do.

O happy and gracious way of obedience ! When once we make up our minds to follow the Divine will, crooked paths become straight, strength comes out of weakness. God tells us sufficiently, through the ordinary means of His Church, His Holy Word, His ministers, what He would have us do. We are not meant to sit and dream, but to rise and obey readily.

11. And when I could not see for the glory of that light, being led by the hand of them that were with me, I came into Damascus.

What a change from the pride of his own knowledge, from the power and authority with which he had set out ! Now he is blind and in others' leading. He has lost his way, and is only gradually finding the right path. Those dark and lonely hours were the season when all God's mercy and his own condition came home to him ; they were not thrown away.

12. And one Ananias, a devout man according to the law, having a good report of all the Jews which dwelt there, 13. came unto me, and stood, and said unto me, Brother Saul, receive thy sight. And the same hour I looked up upon him.

Fancy what joy this business must have been to Ananias. Instead of the cruel persecution which he and the other Christians there had reason to expect, he was now to take comfortable words from Christ Himself to the great persecutor. God turned all their heaviness into joy.

14. And he said, The God of our fathers hath chosen thee, that thou shouldest know his will, and see that Just One, and shouldest hear the voice of his mouth.

The eternal purpose, the sovereign choice, the guiding hand of our God, all appear in our conversion. What merits had we to attract Divine mercy? Can we not also say that we have come to know God's will, to see Christ revealed in His Gospel, to hear His Divine words? It may not have been in such a sudden and overpowering manner as in S. Paul's case, but it is no less true and life-giving, otherwise we cannot work for God. Our hearts must be His before our lips can speak effectually for Him.

15. For thou shalt be his witness unto all men of what thou hast seen and heard.

It was this which equalled S. Paul with the other apostles. He had seen Jesus Christ, he had heard Him speak; now he was able to bring souls to Him. If not in the great apostle's power, yet still in a true manner we also are Christ's witnesses. We have to tell others what we have learnt from our Divine Lord, how we have found light instead of darkness, how the world's ways are evil and end in misery. Why have we learnt all this, but to tell it?

16. And now why tarriest thou? arise, and be baptized, and wash away thy sins, calling on the name of the Lord.

Show me, Lord, how to direct penitent sinners to that cleansing Fountain. It flows not only in Holy Baptism, but in all the ordinances of Thy Church. How can I awaken in dead souls a spirit of prayer, a trust in the love and mercy of our heavenly Father?

17. And it came to pass, that, when I was come again to Jerusalem, even while I prayed in the temple, I was in a trance;

There is a blessing on prayer offered in God's House, amidst the prayers of His people. Probably S. Paul was praying for guidance, deeply perplexed to whom he should speak, troubled because the Jews would not receive his message, and our Lord answered him and showed him what course to take. Do Thou, Lord, in like manner guide and direct our way. We depend on Thee for counsel.

18. And saw him saying unto me, Make haste, and get thee quickly out of Jerusalem: for they will not receive thy testimony concerning me.

The apostle desired to preach to his own countrymen. He was bent on repairing his persecuting zeal; he thought that his words would be listened to, if any one's would. But Christ the Lord had other designs for him. His work would have been a failure in Jerusalem, but God's mercy had prepared for him wonderful successes elsewhere. He overrules seeming failure, seeming loss, to our greater good in the end.

19. And I said, Lord, they know that I imprisoned and beat in every synagogue them that believed on thee: 20. and when

the blood of thy martyr Stephen was shed, I also was standing by, and consenting unto his death, and kept the raiment of them that slew him.

He retained a humble memory of his sins, and was not ashamed to confess and to make amends for them. He learnt now by his own sufferings and dangers to feel for those whom he had ill-used ; their tears, their pain, were present to his mind. He had learnt to sympathize tenderly with sufferers now. He had changed from hatred to love.

*21. And he said unto me, Depart : for I will send thee fur
hence unto the Gentiles.*

Lord, this commission is not yet spent. How many nations are there in distant lands who have not yet known Thee? Do Thou inspire missionaries with zeal to fulfil Thy Divine command. S. Paul was cut off by death before he could himself preach to all nations, but he still goes to them by his doctrine, his letters, his example. May we not suppose that he and other saints in heaven think of missionary work now, and pray for its success?

*22. And they gave him audience unto this word, and then
lifted up their voices, and said, Away with such a fellow from
the earth : for it is not fit that he should live.*

Even such words as S. Paul's, so reverent, so moderate, so truthful, could win no more hearing. Passion resumed its power over the people. So it often is. Truth is overcome by clamour. This world is not the place where truth is welcome, but one day its turn will come. Now men try to put it down and root it up, though all in vain.

*23. And as they cried out, and cast off their clothes, and
threw dust into the air, 24. the chief captain commanded him
to be brought into the castle, and bade that he should be ex-
amined by scourging ; that he might know wherefore they cried
so against him.*

When such times come upon us, fierce enemies, wild outrages, and the prospect of shame and pain, when all looks at its blackest, still God does not forsake His friends.

" When fade all earthly flowers and bays,
When summer friends are gone and fled,
Is he alone in that dark hour
Who owns the Lord of love and power?"

*25. And as they bound him with thongs, Paul said unto the
centurion that stood by, Is it lawful for you to scourge a man
that is a Roman, and uncondemned ?*

The Romans were a law-abiding people. They were proud of that old law which protected the person of any Roman citizen from punishment without trial. God gave them this work to do, to make laws and to inspire the world with a sense of duty and right.

Let us be thankful for good laws, and endeavour to obey them. They are not able to save souls or lead us to heaven, yet they are a token of our Father's care for us.

26. When the centurion heard that, he went and told the chief captain, saying, Take heed what thou doest: for this man is a Roman. 27. Then the chief captain came, and said unto him, Tell me, art thou a Roman? He said, Yea. 28. And the chief captain answered, With a great sum obtained I this freedom. And Paul said, But I was free born. 29. Then straightway they departed from him which should have examined him: and the chief captain also was afraid, after he knew that he was a Roman, and because he had bound him.

Roman citizenship with its rights was sometimes given in payment for money, sometimes bestowed as a reward for good service, and it was passed on as an inheritance to children. In a world of slavery, what a refuge and strength it was to be a Roman citizen! Our God has mercifully made us members of Christ and heirs of heaven. We have a right to the graces and consolations of the Gospel. This is true freedom. How grievous it would be if we threw all this away and became slaves of Satan!

30. On the morrow, because he would have known the certainty wherefore he was accused of the Jews, he loosed him from his bands, and commanded the chief priests and all their council to appear, and brought Paul down, and set him before them.

Here is a scene repeated from the Gospels. Jesus our Lord stood once before the high priest and his council, yet only to be condemned as a blasphemer. Here is the same scene too as in Acts vi.; then it was Stephen who stood in the same place, and met with the same sentence. Now it is S. Paul's turn. Sometimes it is the very heads of God's Church who have been wofully mistaken, have condemned saints and upheld wrong. Christ and His martyrs have stood before them and not been recognised.

CHAPTER XXIII.

- 1. As Paul pleadeth his cause, 2. Ananias commandeth them to smite him. 7. Dissension among his accusers. 11. God encourageth him. 14. The Jews' laying wait for Paul 20. is declared unto the chief captain. 27. He sendeth him to Felix the governor.

AND Paul, earnestly beholding the council, said, Men and brethren, I have lived in all good conscience before God until this day.

Even in the time of his ignorance, he had followed conscience, had thought that he was doing his duty. Indeed he confessed his sin before God, and owned that his conscience had been wrong ; yet he could truly say he had obeyed it. Much more so, since Christ the Lord had enlightened him from above. Let us follow conscience, which is the inward voice telling us what to do and what to avoid, and also strive by prayer and reflection to have our conscience taught to speak rightly.

2. And the high priest Ananias commanded them that stood by him to smite him on the mouth.

Jesus our Lord had been treated just in this way (John xviii. 22). How marvellous it is that the holiest and most upright persons the world has known have been thought too bad for civil treatment, their words refused a hearing, their cause out of favour with all! Such reflections should make us consider how wonderfully wrong the world's judgment sometimes is. Why do we follow it so slavishly ?

3. Then said Paul unto him, God shall smite thee, thou whitewashed wall : for sittest thou to judge me after the law, and commandest me to be smitten contrary to the law ?

Was S. Paul wrong in speaking sharply under the provocation of this ill-usage ? We cannot say. No doubt Jesus, his Divine Master, bore like treatment quite patiently. Yet grace is not meant to destroy honest indignation. The apostle felt that he was unjustly and cruelly used, and said so. However, our best way is to pray for patience at such seasons, our danger mostly is in being too sharp and angry. We should practise ourselves in restraining the desire to make an angry answer.

4. And they that stood by said, Revilest thou God's high priest ? 5. Then said Paul, I wist not, brethren, that he was the high priest : for it is written, Thou shalt not speak evil of the ruler of thy people.

He did not know that it was the high priest who had spoken, or perhaps he had scarcely given it a thought, when he replied as he did. He would have us behave lowly and reverently to our betters. Far from Christians be that upstart, insolent spirit of modern days which overthrows all the old landmarks and forgets the reverence due to age and dignity. If at any time we chance to speak roughly, let us be ready to make amends as S. Paul was. To be courteous is a duty which he himself enjoins on Christians.

6. But when Paul perceived that the one part were Sadducees, and the other Pharisees, he cried out in the council, Men and brethren, I am a Pharisee, the son of a Pharisee : of the hope and resurrection of the dead I am called in question.

It was his preaching the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting which had offended his hearers. If he had been content to do as the Sadducees, confine all prospects to this narrow life, and regard the invisible world as a dream, then he would have been safe enough. Indeed it was the resurrection through Christ Jesus that he preached, and salvation through faith in His Name; but he had common ground with the Pharisees in speaking at all about the life to come. He clung to this as being a great bond of union between himself and them, and so it is.

- 7. And when he had so said, there arose a dissension between the Pharisees and the Sadducees : and the multitude was divided.
8. For the Sadducees say that there is no resurrection, neither angel, nor spirit : but the Pharisees confess both.*

May God in His dear mercy keep us from becoming Sadducees. Certainly the Pharisees on their side went very wrong, but if we were to throw off faith in eternal life, in God's grace, in His invisible realm, what a power the flesh and the devil would have over us! It is in our worst moments that we are doubtful about God's revelation ; but when we strive to love and do right, and to rule our passions, then it all shines forth again on the soul. God keep it ever bright and near to us.

- 9. And there arose a great cry : and the scribes that were of the Pharisees' part arose, and strove, saying, We find no evil in this man : but if a spirit or an angel hath spoken to him, let us not fight against God.*

They remembered only some bits of S. Paul's defence and forgot the rest. They remembered he had told of a vision and of a message, but did not trouble to think who it was or what the heavenly Visitor had to say. This is very like our own habit in reading a pious book or hearing a sermon. We remember trifles, and put aside the bearing of the message on our own duty.

- 10. And when there arose a great dissension, the chief captain, fearing lest Paul should have been pulled in pieces of them, commanded the soldiers to go down, and to take him by force from among them, and to bring him into the castle.*

How the Jews' behaviour must have hindered inquiring heathens from the knowledge of the true God! The chief captain must have reflected that if the Jewish worship and Scripture only made their followers so outrageous, he had better have none of them. This is what happens in the colonies. Heathens who see our quarrels and our vices are set against our faith and remain idolaters.

- 11. And the night following the Lord stood by him, and said, Be of good cheer, Paul : for as thou hast testified of me in Jerusalem, so must thou bear witness also at Rome.*

After the fierce outcries and imminent dangers of the day, what a vision of peace, what a comforting promise ! Here is a gracious word that sustained the apostle during his long imprisonment and his shipwreck, and through all the many trials of the next few years. He must often have dwelt upon it and felt comforted. May we in the hour of trial recognise that voice speaking within to assure us that our Master is with us. May we, wherever we go, be witnesses for Christ.

12. And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul. 13. And they were more than forty which had made this conspiracy.

The lukewarmness of Christians is rebuked by the zeal and diligence of the devil's ministers. How slow we are to unite for prayer or good works, how little we care to help each other, while our enemies are up early and stirring with all their power to carry out their designs of evil ! Why, they give up not only their rest, but their food, so strong is their hatred of the apostle. All this makes a marvellous contrast to my neglect and indifference when the rescue of any soul is in question.

14. And they came to the chief priests and elders, and said, We have bound ourselves under a great curse, that we will eat nothing until we have slain Paul. 15. Now therefore ye with the council signify to the chief captain that he bring him down unto you to morrow, as though ye would enquire something more perfectly concerning him : and we, or ever he come near, are ready to kill him.

We do not find that the priests rebuked the bloodthirstiness or the treachery of this suggestion. No, they thought anything was lawful against a man whom they hated. Though they were the ministers of God's old covenant, and had His Word in their hands, which said, "Love the truth and peace, saith the Lord of Hosts," yet they forgot all that side of its teaching. Let us pray and watch over ourselves lest our passion blind us also. We too are in danger, when we are provoked, of forgetting all God's gracious warnings.

16. And when Paul's sister's son heard of their lying in wait, he went and entered into the castle, and told Paul.

Were S. Paul's sister and her son Christians ? We know not. Yet at least this youth must have loved the apostle and been willing to risk some danger in saving his life. Though he was but a lad, yet he must have had courage to risk and prudence to escape the notice of the watchful Sadducees, pass through the guard, disclose the danger. Thus he obtained notice in Holy Scripture, and became an instrument in carrying out God's great designs for the conversion

of the world. I do not suppose he thought of all this, but at least he was brave and affectionate, and so he did a great benefit for generations to come.

17. Then Paul called one of the centurions unto him, and said, Bring this young man unto the chief captain: for he hath a certain thing to tell him. 18. So he took him, and brought him to the chief captain, and said, Paul the prisoner called me unto him, and prayed me to bring this young man unto thee, who hath something to say unto thee.

Why, had not Christ promised the apostle that he should get safe to Rome? Ought he not to have rested contented with that? Indeed God would have us rely on His overruling Providence, but still take all ordinary means of precaution. We are not to sit still with our hands folded, and wait for Him to help us. It is part of His wise plan that we should bestir ourselves and do our best.

19. Then the chief captain took him by the hand, and went with him aside privately, and asked him, What is that thou hast to tell me? 20. And he said, The Jews have agreed to desire thee that thou wouldest bring down Paul to morrow into the council, as though they would enquire somewhat of him more perfectly. 21. But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

I suppose danger like this, staring us in the face as it did the apostle, would wake up our conscience. We live, for the most part, quiet uneventful lives. Each day brings its duties and comforts. Thus we get lukewarm, and God seems out of our sight. For the most part, it is trouble, distress, imminent peril, that makes us discern His hand. Here are knives just raised against a life; but a step between S. Paul and death. Who would not desire to pray earnestly at such a moment? Yet we must have learned to believe and love before, or we should have none to fly to then.

22. So the chief captain then let the young man depart, and charged him, See thou tell no man that thou hast shewed these things to me.

We hear no more of this young man—he went back to his work or his studies; nor are we told of his uncle's thanks to him, or of the praises which Christians must have given him for saving the great apostle's life. No doubt he obeyed the chief captain's orders, and knew how to hold his tongue when need was, as well as to speak up. If we all were able to avoid gossip about what we have done, how much better the world would go on!

23. And he called unto him two centurions, saying, Make ready two hundred soldiers to go to Cesarea, and horsemen threescore and ten, and spearmen two hundred, at the third hour of the night ; 24. and provide them beasts, that they may set Paul on, and bring him safe unto Felix the governor.

What a great escort ! Nearly five hundred soldiers to guard the apostle. Why was this ? The chief captain knew well the condition of the country. He knew the rebellion was almost ready to break out, as it actually did nine years later ; he desired by such a display of force to render any attack impossible. Yet, after all, the promise of God, His unseen angels, His overshadowing love, were a surer guard to S. Paul than all these brave fellows with their dazzling armour. He looked up to his Divine Master, and knew that His promise of protection could not fail.

25. And he wrote a letter after this manner : 26. Claudio Lysias unto the most excellent governor Felix sendeth greeting. 27. This man was taken of the Jews, and should have been killed of them : then came I with an army, and rescued him, having understood that he was a Roman.

Sometimes when I have been speaking of my own doings, I have made out the best case for myself, as Claudio Lysias did, instead of relating the plain truth. I have taken all the credit, and disguised the mistakes ; in fact it is often my way. When shall I have courage to speak truth exactly, and relate things just as they happened ? How long shall I so covet the praise of men ?

28. And when I would have known the cause wherefore they accused him, I brought him forth into their council : 29. whom I perceived to be accused of questions of their law, but to have nothing laid to his charge worthy of death or of bonds. 30. And when it was told me how that the Jews laid wait for the man, I sent straightway to thee, and gave commandment to his accusers also to say before thee what they had against him. Farewell.

Ah, happy officer, if he had known what treasure he had in his hands ! This was the man who had the message of life, who could tell of the priceless pearl and the hidden treasure, who could point out the way to peace and everlasting joy ; but Claudio Lysias knew nothing of all this, he was glad to get rid of the whole affair, and gave it no further thought. O Lord, open our eyes to see, and our ears to hear, while Thy messengers are by ; let us diligently seek out Thy holy will, not put opportunities aside.

31. Then the soldiers, as it was commanded them, took Paul,

and brought him by night to Antipatris. 32. On the morrow they left the horsemen to go with him, and returned to the castle:

The four hundred soldiers returned when they had set Paul beyond danger, leaving the cavalry escort to go on with him to Cæsarea. It was less than a fortnight since S. Paul had gone up the same road from Cæsarea to Jerusalem, but how much had happened meanwhile! what dangers, what mercies, what an escape! He was always full of gratitude to God and to loving friends for their care; he always trusted in Divine mercy. We may be sure he prayed and commended all his friends to God in prayer. No stir of soldiers round could keep him from that.

33. Who, when they came to Cæsarea, and delivered the epistle to the governor, presented Paul also before him. 34. And when the governor had read the letter, he asked of what province he was. And when he understood that he was of Cilicia; 35. I will hear thee, said he, when thine accusers are also come. And he commanded him to be kept in Herod's judgment hall.

In chap. xxi. 8 he had been staying at Cæsarea, at S. Philip's house, with other loving friends who were fain to weep and break his heart with their kind entreaties, whose closing word was, "The will of the Lord be done." Those were humble people, and entertained him quietly, no great ones knew of his presence there; but now he comes back with a mighty guard, and is introduced to his excellency the governor, and lodged in a room of Herod's palace. Ah, I think he must have missed the society of the disciples. I daresay some of them got leave to visit him, and congratulate and condole with him by turns.

CHAPTER XXIV.

1. Paul being accused by Tertullus the orator, 10. answereth for his life and doctrine. 24. He preacheth Christ to the governor and his wife. 26. The governor hopeth for a bribe, but in vain. 27. At last, going out of his office, he leaveth Paul in prison.

AND after five days Ananias the high priest descended with the elders, and with a certain orator named Tertullus, who informed the governor against Paul.

S. Paul's enemies lost no time. They gave up at once their sacred and secular duties at Jerusalem, took a long and tedious journey, spared no pains or expense in getting up a case against him. When shall we be as zealous in God's service? Oh that God's servants

would spend half the pains in doing good, in helping truth, in succouring the needy, that the devil's agents spend on the side of evil!

2. And when he was called forth, Tertullus began to accuse him, saying, Seeing that by thee we enjoy great quietness, and that very worthy deeds are done unto this nation by thy providence, 3. we accept it always, and in all places, most noble Felix, with all thankfulness. 4. Notwithstanding, that I be not further tedious unto thee, I pray thee that thou wouldest hear us of thy clemency a few words.

Here is abundance of flattery and very little truth, for Felix was in reality neither just nor merciful; and the Jews hated him. Yet Tertullus knew how men like to be praised. Defend us, Lord, from this sweet incense of flattery, which bewilders our sound judgment. Keep us from false friends, who encourage us in folly by praising us to the skies. It is so easy to take praise to ourselves and quite forget our real faults; only the habit of prayer can teach us what we truly are.

5. For we have found this man a pestilent fellow, and a mover of sedition among all the Jews throughout the world, and a ringleader of the sect of the Nazarenes :

Here are two grave charges, sedition and heresy. S. Paul appears as a rebel against Cæsar and a perverter of God's people. He is set forth as troublesome and incorrigible in evil-doing. Do not be frightened at these hard words. Christ the Lord Himself, His prophets and saints, have had much the same things said of them. No one ever set to work to do good but he got bespattered with hard names from this malicious world.

6. Who also hath gone about to profane the temple : whom we took, and would have judged according to our law.

Here is yet another charge. S. Paul has profaned God's holy Temple, which was the most sacred place on earth, and guarded with the utmost care from any intrusion. Must he not therefore have deserved death? No, do not give heed to this last accusation any more than to the two former. God's true temple is man's heart; it is evil thoughts and tempers that profane it. The preaching of Christ's Gospel cleanses that inward temple, sets up true worship there, sanctifies the place to Divine uses. May we be kept from profaning by sin that temple in which God's Spirit has come to dwell.

7. But the chief captain Lysias came upon us, and with great violence took him away out of our hands, 8. commanding his accusers to come unto thee : by examining of whom thyself

mkest take knowledge of all these things, whereof we accuse him.

How false a tale is all this ! What a fine colour to put on hatred and assassination ! Still it is not unlike the alteration which is often made in a story when it has been told over two or three times. Many things which seemed to our discredit get softened down, and our own fairness, or smartness, gets more brought out. Often and often I have related things that I have done or said with some little touches which altered them a good deal in my favour.

9. *And the Jews also assented, saying that these things were so.*

Which way does our influence go, for God's truth or against it ? We must be helping on one side or the other. These Jews did not utter all Tertullus' untruths, but they assented, and so made them their own. Let us never be ashamed to stand up for truth, knowing that it will win at last. In that great day when all things will be manifested those who upheld lies will be confounded. God will declare at last that He is on the side of truth.

10. *Then Paul, after that the governor had beckoned unto him to speak, answered, Forasmuch as I know that thou hast been of many years a judge unto this nation, I do the more cheerfully answer for myself :*

Here are great respect, great courage, great simplicity. He paid no false compliments, but said that he stood forward cheerfully, trusting in the judge to give him a patient hearing, and knowing that he had to do with one who understood well how to administer justice. The word "cheerfully" reminds us how the apostle forgot bruises, dangers, insults, and strengthened himself in God. Nothing could take away the comfort which God gave him.

11. *Because that thou mayest understand, that there are yet but twelve days since I went up to Jerusalem for to worship.*

What a busy twelve days it had been, full of dangers and mercies ! Perhaps one day all our life will seem, looking back, like a very short but stormy voyage ; it will be but a few troubled days in retrospect, though now it seems so long. S. Paul's purpose in going to the Temple had been to worship there. No dangers could keep him from the public service of God. He honoured that holy House wherein God's Name had been praised for so long, wherein Christ the Lord Himself had prayed and taught.

12. *And they neither found me in the temple disputing with any man, neither raising up the people, neither in the synagogues, nor in the city : 13. neither can they prove the things whereof they now accuse me.*

Here the apostle answers the charge of sedition. He had not disputed with any man, or gathered any crowd together in Jerusalem. His errand there was wholly for devotion and charity. Indeed God had sent him to the Gentile world, and he had disputed there and gathered souls round him, his word had been like a burning fire ; but in Jerusalem he had been silent, had obeyed, had complied with prejudices. His mission there was to win souls by humble obedience, not by stirring exhortations. God teach us when to speak and when to be silent.

14. But this I confess unto thee, that after the way which they call heresy, so worship I the God of my fathers, believing all things which are written in the law and in the prophets :

The second charge is that of heresy. He answers boldly that he is a Christian ; that part of the charge is quite true, but he denies that it is a new religion. He worships the God of Israel, he believes in the Jewish Scriptures. May we, by God's mercy, cling to the old ways. We are ready to learn new truth, we look out for God's guidance daily, still we must never give up our old prayers, our childhood's faith. The God of our fathers is very dear to us. We have had a long experience of His mercies.

15. And have hope toward God, which they themselves also allow, that there shall be a resurrection of the dead, both of the just and unjust.

Can I hope for immortality, or is it my fear and dread? If I believe, and love, and strive against sin, then it is a comforting thought to remember that there is a life to come. I hope for a day when God's justice will be revealed and earth's sorrows all done away ; but if I live for self, if I am one of the unrighteous, then the expectation of another life can be only misery, then I put it away, or cannot think of it without fear.

16. And herein do I exercise myself, to have always a conscience void of offence toward God, and toward men.

Perhaps our conscience answers sadly to this verse ; we have not striven to keep it bright, as S. Paul did. It tells us of offences against God and against man, even of wilful and crying sin. Yet courage, Christ died to purge our conscience and set it free again. There is a store of pardon open even to us. Let no man say, My conscience is defiled past cleansing, or seared past feeling, for Divine mercy can do away all that is past.

17. Now after many years I came to bring alms to my nation, and offerings. 18. Whereupon certain Jews from Asia found me purified in the temple, neither with multitude, nor with tumult.

Here is the answer to the third charge. So far from profaning the Temple, he had not entered it for many years till this occasion.

Then he came up to bring alms for his countrymen and offer sacrifices in the Temple. He had complied with all the rites required. May I learn to behave reverently in God's House. Too often I bring a multitude of cares, a tumult of foolish thoughts there. Too often I speak and act as if it was like any other place. Whenever I am found in a church, may I be found behaving suitably.

19. Who ought to have been here before thee, and object, if they had ought against me.

His enemies dared not appear and swear to his profaning the Temple. They kept away because they had no real proof to bring. I am thankful if no one can prove any actual crime against me. It is God's goodness, not my own strength, that has so far kept me out of trouble; but yet I fear there are many who could testify against me of duties left undone, of harsh words or unkind acts. If men's voices do not accuse me, yet I know I have been to blame.

20. Or else let these same here say, if they have found any evil doing in me, while I stood before the council, 21. except it be for this one voice, that I cried standing among them, Touching the resurrection of the dead I am called in question by you this day.

All turns at last on the question of the Resurrection. If the dead have no awakening to look forward to, then Jesus our Lord never rose. Then He was a deceiver. Then we ourselves have no after-life, no recompense. Then all are alike at last, whether saints or sinners, and self-denial, patience, and faith are but a dream. When deadly temptations assail me then comes the question, Do I believe in the resurrection of the body and the life everlasting, or has all my faith vanished?

22. And when Felix heard these things, having more perfect knowledge of that way, he deferred them, and said, When Lysias the chief captain shall come down, I will know the uttermost of your matter. 23. And he commanded a centurion to keep Paul, and to let him have liberty, and that he should forbid none of his acquaintance to minister or come unto him.

Perhaps Felix knew Cornelius or some other Christian soldiers; anyhow he knew quite enough about Christians not to reckon them as altogether bad. He understood that the Jews hated them, but his own experience of Christians had been in their favour; indeed he ought to have set the apostle free, but he would not go so far to displease the Jews, as that would have been. No doubt S. Paul in all this looked up to God and discerned His merciful Providence. What seems like the violence or the caprice of men yet works out our Father's gracious plan. In the Jews' enmity, in Felix' indifference, in the regrets and loving visits of the Christians at Cæsarea, God's hand was still to be seen.

24. And after certain days, when Felix came with his wife Drusilla, which was a Jewess, he sent for Paul, and heard him concerning the faith in Christ.

Felix and Drusilla sent for the apostle to entertain them with his discourse. They knew he could speak well, and thought he could help them to pass away an hour or two. They liked to hear anything new. Let us, when we hear a sermon or read a religious book, come with a serious meaning. We shall get no good otherwise. Such matters are too grave to be trifled over. What profit shall we find in God's Word unless He bless it to us?

25. And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time; when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee.

Alas! if Felix had but asked, "What shall I do to be saved?" if he had said, "Lord be merciful to me a sinner," then that day might have been to him the beginning of salvation; but he put off doing anything. He trembled at the apostle's words, the thought of judgment to come made him think, "What will become of me if all this is true?" but he fought against the impression, rose up and went away, perhaps to plunge into vice as before, and the opportunity of conversion never came again.

26. He hoped also that money should have been given him of Paul, that he might loose him: wherefore he sent for him the oftener, and communed with him.

Why, here were many opportunities, many convenient seasons for hearing about faith in Christ. No, the governor had had enough of that. He did not want to hear any more of such awful matters as the day of judgment. He had no mind now to turn to God; all he thought of was to induce S. Paul to bribe him in order to get free. Laying up a great store of money against he gave up his office seemed more important to him than laying up good works against the day of wrath to come.

27. But after two years Porcius Festus came into Felix' room: and Felix, willing to shew the Jews a pleasure, left Paul bound.

Still he wished to please the Jews; so he dared not do right and justice. He had injured the Jews in many ways by his misgovernment, and he stood in dread of their accusations to the Emperor; so he would please them now, even at the expense of injustice. Is not that often so? We have complied with wrong, and so dare not do right now. Conscience makes cowards of us. If we had but stood up for righteousness boldly, we could look any man in the face now, and do what we know to be our duty.

CHAPTER XXV.

2. The Jews accuse Paul before Festus. **8.** He answereth for himself, **11.** and appealeth unto Cæsar. **14.** Afterwards Festus openeth his matter to king Agrippa, **23.** and he is brought forth. **25.** Festus cleareth him to have done nothing worthy of death.

NOw when Festus was come into the province, after three days he ascended from Cæsarea to Jerusalem.

With what thoughts a just and observant man must have come to govern Judæa ! He had to do with a strange people, who had such a pure religion, such a holy law, and yet were so violent and ungovernable, so bitter and exclusive towards other people. He must have marvelled at such a mixture of good and evil in them. The whole country was in confusion, and there needed both justice and mercy in any one who would bring it into order. Festus had but a very short while in which to do his work, for he died after he had been governor in Judea a year or little more.

2. Then the high priest and the chief of the Jews informed him against Paul, and besought him, **3.** and desired favour against him, that he would send for him to Jerusalem, laying wait in the way to kill him.

What sleepless malice ! Nothing could make them forget their grudge against S. Paul. Lord, give me a forgiving heart ; may I easily pass over injuries done to myself ; may time, as it goes by, take away bitter memories and discords, and leave only thoughts of peace. How sad it is when remembrances of hard words or unkind acts remain fresh, and do mischief year after year ! Why, do we not need God's mercy to wipe out our own score of offences against Him ?

4. But Festus answered, that Paul should be kept at Cæsarea, and that he himself would depart shortly thither. **5.** Let them therefore, said he, which among you are able, go down with me, and accuse this man, if there be any wickedness in him.

God overruled Festus' heart, as he had those of Lysias and of Felix, to protect the apostle against his enemies. Those officers thought of little but maxims of state policy, but God had to fulfil His promise to S. Paul, had yet great works for him to do in preaching and writing, had great purposes to accomplish by his means. This is the inner side of the web ; all that men's eyes see is the wrong side, the rough confused tangle of human passions ; but faith looks within and sees the right side, the well-ordered pattern of God's wise Providence.

6. And when he had tarried among them more than ten days, he went down unto Cæsarea ; and the next day sitting on the judgment seat commanded Paul to be brought. 7. And when he was come, the Jews which came down from Jerusalem stood round about, and laid many and grievous complaints against Paul, which they could not prove.

Here the world judges the saints. One day the case will be reversed. Jesus Himself and His holiest servants have had to stand defenceless at the bar of this world and bear all manner of reviling. O marvellous change ! A day will come when truth shall appear and lies flee away, when Christ the Lord will

“ Before the universe confess
His faint but faithful witnesses.”

8. While he answered for himself, Neither against the law of the Jews, neither against the temple, nor yet against Cæsar, have I offended any thing at all.

No heresy, for he worshipped his fathers' God, and believed the law and prophets. No profaneness, for he had been to the Temple for purposes of devotion only. No rebellion, for he had caused no tumult, made no following. Such were his plain and straightforward answers. May we, in our day of trial, be as able to give as good account of ourselves at the judgment-seat of man or of God. May our many real offences be cancelled by pardoning mercy.

9. But Festus, willing to do the Jews a pleasure, answered Paul, and said, Wilt thou go up to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these things before me ?

S. Paul would go no more to the earthly Jerusalem ; his heart was fixed on that Jerusalem which is above, and is truly free. The Holy City of this world had now become a place of enmity and danger for God's servants. They were unjustly judged and cast out thence. God's dear mercy has provided for us an abiding city, where our home is ready, where the saints look out for our coming.

10. Then said Paul, I stand at Cæsar's judgment seat, where I ought to be judged : to the Jews have I done no wrong, as thou very well knowest. 11. For if I be an offender, or have committed any thing worthy of death, I refuse not to die : but if there be none of these things whereof these accuse me, no man may deliver me unto them. I appeal unto Cæsar.

Cæsar is God's minister. His justice is a refuge for the persecuted. His judges do God's bidding in administering the law. Those times have been very evil in which the Church has usurped the power of government, and mixed up matters of religion with the rights and wrongs of this world. Such a confusion has injured both the

Church and the law. May God of His goodness keep the Church from interfering in any civil affairs, and enable the Queen's ministers and judges to do true justice for her people. May we be able to trust their uprightness. May we find in them a protection against injustice, as S. Paul found in his appeal to the Emperor.

12. Then Festus, when he had conferred with the council, answered, Hast thou appealed unto Cæsar? unto Cæsar shall thou go.

Much higher orders than Festus could give had been given for the apostle to go to Rome. The governor and his council were but instruments in the hands of God. The Emperor Nero was now beginning to turn to all manner of evil ways. He misused his unlimited power to gratify his passions. He ruled the world, yet could not rule himself, and God designed that the great apostle of the Gentiles should stand before him as a criminal. Such converting power, such penitence and holiness, to stand and be judged by him who was so utterly vile! O strange ways of Divine Providence!

13. And after certain days king Agrippa and Bernice came unto Cæsarea to salute Festus.

King Agrippa was the last of the Herod family, the son of that king Herod who died so miserably (Acts xii.), Bernice and Drusilla (chap. xxiv.) were his sisters. These two came only on a visit of courtesy to the new governor, but God put a great opportunity in their way. Let us look out for occasions of grace, and catch them, lest they pass and come no more. Divine mercy may have a word for our souls when we expect it least.

14. And when they had been there many days, Festus declared Paul's cause unto the king, saying, There is a certain man left in bonds by Felix:

The king, the princess, and the governor had many other things to attend to before they took any notice of the imprisoned apostle. Many days had been spent. There had been, no doubt, entertainments, and interviews, and much solemn trifling. At last the governor happened to recollect his obscure prisoner, and remembered to tell the king about him. Yet the very thing that has preserved the names of those three is their being connected, if but for a moment, with S. Paul. God's great apostle, full of power, full of wisdom, has grown more glorious through all the ages, while kings and princes are forgotten.

15. About whom, when I was at Jerusalem, the chief priests and the elders of the Jews informed me, desiring to have judgment against him. 16. To whom I answered, It is not the manner of the Romans to deliver any man to die, before that he which is accused have the accusers face to face, and have

licence to answer for himself concerning the crime laid against him.

This just rule was that of the Jewish law also, but the Jews had forgotten it. It was left for the Romans to recall it to the world. God instructed them how to do justice and judgment. In our own ordinary conversation we are much too ready to condemn without waiting for the defence. Many persons whom we condemn sharply would put quite a different aspect on the matter if they had a chance to explain it. God enable us to refrain from harsh judgments.

17. *Therefore, when they were come hither, without any delay on the morrow I sat on the judgment seat, and commanded the man to be brought forth.*

Festus had attended to his business. He had gone into S. Paul's cause at once without any delay. When he entered the province, instead of amusing himself or paying visits, he set to work at once to hear the causes that were down for trial. This is a good example of diligence. God would have us not slothful in business, and above all in business that affects the comfort and welfare of our neighbours.

18. *Against whom when the accusers stood up, they brought none accusation of such things as I supposed: 19. but had certain questions against him of their own superstition, and of one Jesus, which was dead, whom Paul affirmed to be alive.*

How he speaks of the Lord of quick and dead! Do we stand up with S. Paul in this matter? Do we believe in Jesus as a living Lord, a Master Who observes our actions? He is not a good man who died once, but a mighty Saviour able to befriend us. This we should believe, and affirm, and teach others. It is our life and hope to be sure of this.

20. *And because I doubted of such manner of questions, I asked him whether he would go to Jerusalem, and there be judged of these matters. 21. But when Paul had appealed to be reserved unto the hearing of Augustus, I commanded him to be kept till I might send him to Caesar.*

The Jews would allow S. Paul no fair hearing. Festus was only perplexed by his words. The Emperor was steeped in lust and wickedness, and so, when at last he heard him, got no profit at all. We have heard S. Paul many times, not preaching in the body, but speaking to us by his words and writings. Let us turn our opportunities to account. We know what the apostle desires to teach us. He would have us love, and worship, and obey the Lord Jesus.

22. *Then Agrippa said unto Festus, I would also hear the man myself. To morrow, said he, thou shalt hear him.*

The king really felt curious to listen to this eccentric man. He would bestow a leisure afternoon, if the governor pleased, in hearing what oddities the man had to recount. This is the world's view of the apostles. Faith, on the other hand, sings of them that

"They the Church's princes are,
Triumphant leaders in the war,
In heavenly courts a warrior band,
True lights to lighten every land."

23. And on the morrow, when Agrippa was come, and Bernice, with great pomp, and was entered into the place of hearing, with the chief captains, and principal men of the city, at Festus' commandment Paul was brought forth.

Agrippa and Bernice despised inward glory. They were stained by sin, and utterly indifferent about God's service. All their glory was without. They had grand dresses, fine liveries, much respect and reverence from bystanders. God takes no account of outward pomp. He looks at the heart, and sees what is worthy of honour there. True faith and purity of conscience are holy and reverent in His eyes.

24. And Festus said, King Agrippa, and all men which are here present with us, ye see this man, about whom all the multitude of the Jews have dealt with me, both at Jerusalem, and also here, crying that he ought not to live any longer.

Festus knew nothing of the multitude of Christian prayers that went up for S. Paul, praying God that he might live longer. Those cries were more powerful to preserve him than his enemies' cries to do him harm. When S. Paul found his enemies were eager to destroy him, he bade his friends strive the more earnestly in prayer for him. Oh that we did thus, that we heartily sought to help our friends by prayer!

25. But when I found that he had committed nothing worthy of death, and that he himself hath appealed to Augustus, I have determined to send him. 26. Of whom I have no certain thing to write unto my lord. Wherefore I have brought him forth before you, and specially before thee, O king Agrippa, that, after examination had, I might have somewhat to write.

God designed S. Paul to bear testimony before the great ones of the earth. When he was free he addressed not many wise, not many mighty; but, as a prisoner, governors and kings, and the Emperor himself are among his congregation. Before the history of the Acts closes we see how Christian testimony has risen up even to the notice of the great. What our Saviour said (Matt. x. 18) has come true.

27. For it seemeth to me unreasonable to send a prisoner, and not withal to signify the crimes laid against him.

No doubt it would have been absurd to send a prisoner without any account of his cause. How could the Emperor decide, how could the culprit be tried, if no documents about him were accessible? But people do a great many unreasonable things in life; they condemn their brethren without any hearing at all, quarrel for life about some absurd trifle, give up their peace of mind for some petty matter. How utterly unreasonable most of our differences are!

CHAPTER XXVI.

- s.** Paul, in the presence of Agrippa, declareth his life from his childhood, 12. and how miraculously he was converted, and called to his apostleship. 24. Festus chargeth him to be mad, whereunto he answereth modestly. 28. Agrippa is almost persuaded to be a Christian. 31. The whole company pronounce him innocent.

THEN Agrippa said unto Paul, *Thou art permitted to speak for thyself. Then Paul stretched forth the hand, and answered for himself:*

And not only for himself, but for his Master. He is not now concerned so much to defend himself against accusations as to set forth the power and mercy of Jesus glorified. Christ the Light of the world is the subject of his answer. He relates the marvellous change that Divine grace had wrought in himself, longing to see the same in other hearts also. He had a tale to tell of his own darkness turned into light, and thus he would affect his hearers.

- 2.** *I think myself happy, king Agrippa, because I shall answer for myself this day before thee touching all the things whereof I am accused of the Jews: 3. especially because I know thee to be expert in all customs and questions which are among the Jews: wherefore I beseech thee to hear me patiently.*

Agrippa was familiar with the legal sacrifices, Jewish customs, Old Testament Scriptures. He knew what the hope of Israel was. All this should have been in his case a preparation for the Gospel. Those truths which God set forth in Christ Jesus were first shadowed out in the Old Testament dispensation, and devout persons who had learned them there delighted to see them fulfilled in Christ. What did Agrippa lack to hear Paul profitably? Only a serious heart, only a sense of sin; he lived on in sinful pleasures, and so, though he listened patiently, he carried nothing away.

- 4.** *My manner of life from my youth, which was at the first among mine own nation at Jerusalem, know all the Jews: 5. which knew me from the beginning, if they would testify, that after the most straitest sect of our religion I lived a Pharisee.*

His education and life as a Jew, his principles as a Pharisee, his hatred of all who differed from the legal strictness, were so many chains which Divine grace broke in his conversion. He it was who became to Gentiles as a Gentile, saw how the Law had passed away, went forth to make all men brothers in Christ. If God's power did this with him, is it less mighty to overcome the hindrances which prevent us from bearing testimony to the Gospel? Our great infirmities and drawbacks are nothing in His sight. He can make us fit instruments for His work.

6. And now I stand and am judged for the hope of the promise made of God unto our fathers : 7. unto which promise our twelve tribes, instantly serving God day and night, hope to come. For which hope's sake, king Agrippa, I am accused of the Jews.

All true religion looks forward. True Israelites hoped for that King Who should rule in righteousness, should break the chains of death, should offer a cleansing for the soul. It was their hope and longing to see His days. Christians also long for heaven, for righteousness, for peace. This world at its best cannot come up to their expectations. They hope for the New Jerusalem.

8. Why should it be thought a thing incredible with you, that God should raise the dead ?

Why ! did not Almighty God make the world at first, and breathe life into it ? Does not evil and misery cry out for a future day of reckoning ? Are there not already many marvels, past analyzing, in our own minds and bodies ? Dear friends, do not limit God's power to what you now experience. There are other wonders possible in the ages to come. It would indeed be a thing incredible that the iron walls of this present life should be the prison-house of all our hopes.

9. I verily thought with myself, that I ought to do many things contrary to the name of Jesus of Nazareth.

He had been deeply prejudiced, fully persuaded. He not only despised, but abhorred the Saviour's Name. None of all his audience can be more settled in their adverse judgment than he himself once was. See how he thinks of those before whom he is speaking ; how he desires their salvation. He does not want to beg himself off, but to win them to reflect upon the Crucified Lord, and perhaps find out their mistake, as he himself has done.

10. Which thing I also did in Jerusalem : and many of the saints did I shut up in prison, having received authority from the chief priests ; and when they were put to death, I gave my voice against them. 11. And I punished them oft in every synagogue, and compelled them to blaspheme ; and being exceed-

ingly mad against them, I persecuted them even unto strange cities.

Ah, what a sad record ! not only blasphemy, but cruelty, not only bodies ill-used, but souls constrained to forsake their Saviour, at least as far as their persecutors were able to compass it. If in the bygone days we have contributed to make any one forsake God, or purity, or duty, what a bitter reflection for us ! How much zeal we should employ now in doing good ! Here is the history of one who once did all he could to make believers blaspheme their Saviour. No devotion, no labours, no sufferings seemed to him now too much to repair what he had done.

12. Whereupon as I went to Damascus with authority and commission from the chief priests, 13. at midday, O king, I saw in the way a light from heaven, above the brightness of the sun, shining round about me and them which journeyed with me.

That dazzling light was but a figure of the inward light which poured upon his soul. Now he saw the truth clearly, saw what Scripture meant, saw his own mistake, saw all things afresh in that new light. Shall we ever, to all eternity, forget those moments when God's grace first began to shine on us, when we first saw what He is and what we ourselves are ? That heavenly light deserves eternal thankfulness.

14. And when we were all fallen to the earth, I heard a voice speaking unto me, and saying in the Hebrew tongue, Saul, Saul, why persecutest thou me ? it is hard for thee to kick against the pricks.

This is a drover's proverb. No good for the ox to kick against the drover's pointed stick. It meant, " You must submit, must obey, resistance only makes your case worse." God recommends us to obey Him, warns us that disobedience is the harder road at last. Many transgressors have found out the truth of this. They have had to submit at last in shame and tears, instead of following at first the easy road of God's commandments.

15. And I said, Who art thou, Lord ? And he said, I am Jesus whom thou persecutest.

Lord, by Thy mercy bring those to believe who now despise Thee. Speak powerfully to my own heart, and make me feel that Thou art my Saviour and my God. Let Thy sovereign power be exercised in drawing me to Thyself.

16. But rise, and stand upon thy feet : for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose, to make thee a minister and a witness both of these things which thou hast seen, and of those things in the which I will appear unto thee ;

This was the message which came at Damascus a few days after his conversion. He tells how he was called to become a witness to others about Christ Jesus. How can any one be a true minister of the Gospel unless he can tell of it from his own experience, unless he too has felt Christ's mercy, unless he is in correspondence with Divine grace? No, it would be but a useless ministry and dumb witness otherwise. We must have found our Saviour once, and be daily learning new truths from Him, if we would be His servants.

17. Delivering thee from the people, and from the Gentiles, unto whom now I send thee,

Here was a promise of success. Paul was to be delivered till such time as his work was done. This promise came true in numberless marvellous escapes from death. He lived a dying life, as one always on the edge of danger, and he laboured abundantly all the while. When his work was done then God sent merciful death to take him home.

18. To open their eyes, and to turn them from darkness to light, and from the power of Satan unto God, that they may receive forgiveness of sins, and inheritance among them which are sanctified by faith that is in me.

The Gospel does three things for men. 1. Their eyes are opened ; they become conscious of sin, and death, and temptation ; they see where they are, and whither going. 2. They turn from evil to good, shaking off Satan's chains, quitting the ways of darkness, resolving that they will lead a new life. 3. They receive forgiveness for the past and grace for the time to come. God opens His treasures and bestows a clean heart and a new spirit, something precious now as a pledge of eternal life. May the glorious words of this verse be our own experience.

19. Whereupon, O king Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision :

If he had listened to this world's interests, or men's persuasions, he might have disobeyed, but God's grace that had showed him the truth enabled him to obey it. He turned with a perfect heart to be Christ's servant, and took His orders henceforward. What a happy service, though one hard to flesh and blood !

20. But shewed first unto them of Damascus, and at Jerusalem, and throughout all the coasts of Judaea, and then to the Gentiles, that they should repent and turn to God, and do works meet for repentance.

What are works meet for repentance ? Ah, if we have been sinners, we should not be ashamed to forsake sin ; if we have laughed at God's Church, let us now love it ; if religion has been our scoff and

jest, we must patiently put up with ridicule ourselves. Can repentance be real unless the penitent shows by his life that he is a changed man?

21. For these causes the Jews caught me in the temple, and went about to kill me.

It was for the Gospel's sake that he had been in danger. The charges of heresy, sedition, and profaneness were but cloaks for his enemies' zeal against Christ. Those who would not believe in our Lord soon got to hate Him and His servants to the death. They could not bear to hear His claims set forth. If they did not love Him, they abhorred Him.

22. Having therefore obtained help of God, I continue unto this day, witnessing both to small and great, saying none other things than those which the prophets and Moses did say should come :

God's help is sure for all those who trust in Him. God's message is welcome to all those who seek sincerely, whether they are wise or simple, rich or poor. God's truth remains the same through all the ages. His prophets join in the same testimony of His holiness and mercy. Make me, O Lord, experience Thy help, accept Thy Gospel, study Thy Word, that so I may be joined to the blessed company of Thy faithful ones here and hereafter.

23. That Christ should suffer, and that he should be the first that should rise from the dead, and should shew light unto the people, and to the Gentiles.

These are three leading features of the Gospel which S. Paul saw foretold in the Old Testament. The Saviour should be one to suffer, should rise from the dead and begin an immortal life, should bring in all nations to worship the true God. Psalms and Prophets were full of foreshadowings of these thoughts. What matters it that to some the Cross is an offence, the Resurrection a jest, the Catholic Church an object of suspicion? Thank God, I have chosen my side with the saints and believe as they do.

24. And as he thus spake for himself, Festus said with a loud voice, Paul, thou art beside thyself; much learning doth make thee mad.

Conversion, prayer, love of God, a pure conscience, a tender heart, indeed these seem ridiculous to the world. It has no other title but folly to bestow on them. When believers speak of their Divine Master and His atoning work, when they recommend a careful walk, plans of self-denial, times of devotion, sacramental communion, these words are mere empty sound to many. Festus felt the great importance of business, of war, of trade, of success ; beyond this all was dreams.

25. But he said, I am not mad, most noble Festus; but speak forth the words of truth and soberness.

Is not God, are not our sins, are not sorrow and death real enough? How can it be right and wise to live as if this life went on for ever? It is not madness, but sense and true judgment that bids us take into account the invisible world, the needs and dangers of the soul. Nay, taking the world as it is, it is wonderful folly to be wholly taken up with it and have the inward eyes blinded.

26. For the king knoweth of these things, before whom also I speak freely: for I am persuaded that none of these things are hidden from him; for this thing was not done in a corner.

Most true. Jesus our Lord lived and died in the light of history, at a fixed time and place. His risen Life was attested by many witnesses. S. Paul's own conversion was widely known and marvelled at. The Church has taken its place among the facts which we have to meet. God has thus raised up a city even in this world. His eternal truth has come forth visibly and clothed itself in flesh and blood.

27. King Agrippa, believest thou the prophets? I know that thou believest.

Did not the Jews expect a Divine Saviour, One to reign and triumph, One also to suffer, and to overcome by His suffering? They daily heard of Him and prayed for His coming. Would they not recognise His features in our Lord Jesus? If He is not the true Divine King and Prophet, who else has ever fulfilled the idea? Those who believe the Prophets cannot be fully satisfied unless they welcome our Redeemer as the subject of the prophetic story.

28. Then Agrippa said unto Paul, Almost thou persuadest me to be a Christian.

These were not serious words, but contemptuous. The king thought that it was too much for this prisoner to expect to make a Christian of him. What! should he humble his royal dignity, and learning, and popular favour, and take the side of the despised and abhorred Christians, after listening to this one discourse? Was that the meaning of Paul's words? Yes, he so dearly valued his faith and hope that he would have the king share it, and find therein a more than royal treasure.

29. And Paul said, I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether such as I am, except these bonds.

He knew that was the best. His hearers would make a good exchange if they gave up all else and got faith in Christ. Not that S. Paul wished them to share his afflictions. But, apart from that, he could not wish them to be otherwise than believers. Those

who take Christ for their Master never repent. All other service grows wearisome, but this improves all our life through.

30. And when he had thus spoken, the king rose up, and the governor, and Bernice, and they that sat with them.

They had heard enough about religion, the time was come now for them to prepare for the evening entertainment or reception. These grandees had listened to the most eloquent of preachers. In his most affecting and touching address, he had gone through the chief points of salvation, had spoken as a man who himself had been converted by Divine grace, yet they were not the better for it. If this sermon did not make them Christians, shall we be sure that the most weighty preacher, the most pious books, will do us good? Our own hearts must be in earnest, or little result will follow.

31. And when they were gone aside, they talked between themselves, saying, This man doeth nothing worthy of death or of bonds. 32. Then said Agrippa unto Festus, This man might have been set at liberty, if he had not appealed unto Cæsar.

God had ordered it so. It was not S. Paul's own innocence, nor his enemies' malice, nor the wavering policy of this or that governor, but God's Providence that was leading him, in ways not of his own choosing, towards the capital of the world, where many Christians were already waiting for him and praying for him. Under all the events that we see there is a guiding Divine Power that makes crooked ways straight. By prayer we join ourselves to that holy will of God, and share in its peace.

CHAPTER XXVII.

1. Paul shipping toward Rome, 10. foretelleth of the danger of the voyage,
11. but is not believed. 14. They are tossed to and fro with tempest,
41. and suffer shipwreck, 22, 34, 44. yet all come safe to land.

AND when it was determined that we should sail into Italy, they delivered Paul and certain other prisoners unto one named Julius, a centurion of Augustus' band. 2. And entering into a ship of Adramyttium, we launched, meaning to sail by the coasts of Asia; one Aristarchus, a Macedonian of Thessalonica, being with us.

In studying S. Luke's account of the great apostle's voyage and shipwreck which fills this chapter, we can learn many interesting facts about the navigation of the ancients. It is full of terms of sea-

manship, and wants a sailor to explain it ; but we can also learn what courage, what patience, what wisdom Divine faith puts into the heart. We see how this prisoner was yet the guide and adviser of all on board. As we sail through the stormy waves of this life, may our lot be with God's saints, may we have a share in their prayers and faith.

3. And the next day we touched at Sidon. And Julius courteously entreated Paul, and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself.

Our Lord said that Tyre and Sidon would have repented if they had seen His mighty works, and when they came to hear of Him we find that many in both those cities did turn to God with all their hearts. Here were Christians at Sidon who loved the apostle and delighted to furnish him with helps and means for his voyage. After all his sufferings, no doubt friendly faces and kind words must have been a great refreshment.

4. And when we had launched from thence, we sailed under Cyprus, because the winds were contrary. 5. And when we had sailed over the sea of Cilicia and Pamphylia, we came to Myra, a city of Lycia.

Here was the first part of the voyage happily over. They had come from Cæsarea to Myra in Lycia without harm ; indeed the winds were contrary, and they had made but slow way, yet reached their port at last. So it often is in this life, we cannot expect fair winds for long ; what we have to do is to make the best of contrary ones, and pursue our voyage bravely in spite of them. Soon we shall have sailed over the sea of life and reached the shore of eternity.

6. And there the centurion found a ship of Alexandria sailing into Italy ; and he put us therein.

Here the second voyage began, which ended at last in shipwreck. The vessel was large, and held nearly three hundred souls. S. Paul was merely reckoned as one of the prisoners who were on their way to trial ; he was numbered with the transgressors, as his Master had been. Probably blasphemous words, rude companions, constant interruptions, hardships of all kinds, beset him daily, yet he never lost his peace of mind or trust in God.

7. And when we had sailed slowly many days, and scarce were come over against Cnidus, the wind not suffering us, we sailed under Crete, over against Salmine ; 8. and, hardly passing it, came unto a place which is called The fair havens ; nigh whereunto was the city of Lasea.

They were on the southern shore of the great island of Crete or Candia, which has now been for many centuries under Turkish

rule. Its inhabitants have fought bravely and long for their freedom, but God's wise Providence has decided otherwise, so far. Those oppressed Christians in the East may comfort themselves with the thought that the great apostle when he saw their beautiful island was himself a prisoner and subject to insults. They are treated as an inferior race, have to bear penalties and oppression, so had he. In all their slavery they have clung to the Cross, as he did.

9. *Now when much time was spent, and when sailing was now dangerous, because the fast was now already past, Paul admonished them, 10. and said unto them, Sirs, I perceive that this voyage will be with hurt and much damage, not only of the lading and ship, but also of our lives.*

It was October now, autumn-time, and promised to be stormy weather, so S. Paul warned them of the danger they would be in by continuing their voyage. We see, though he had a Divine promise of reaching Rome safely, though he knew nothing could separate him from Christ's love, though he considered death in some respects as far better than life, yet he is just as prudent, cautious, and anxious for the welfare of the ship as though his mind was entirely occupied with this world. He joined together marvellously heavenly calm and earthly forethought.

11. *Nevertheless the centurion believed the master and the owner of the ship, more than those things which were spoken by Paul.*

Paul was frequent in prayer, received Divine visions and comforts, gave up all for Christ; yet his advice was thoroughly sensible, he took an interest in all that was doing, studied the weather and the capacities of the ship, talked with captain and officers about it. All his intercourse with heaven helped, not hindered him, in judging this world's concerns aright.

12. *And because the haven was not commodious to winter in, the more part advised to depart thence also, if by any means they might attain to Phenice, and there to winter; which is an haven of Crete, and lieth toward the south west and north west.*

13. *And when the south wind blew softly, supposing that they had obtained their purpose, looning thence, they sailed close by Crete.*

Here is a short and pleasant voyage before them; it was but a few miles, on a fine autumn day, with the south wind blowing softly, and they would reach a safe harbour wherein to rest for the winter season. Alas! our plans are often made so delightfully, all smiles on us, yet it is but a moment's bright weather and soon passes into cloud and storm. Many people have started in life as hopefully as

these sailors did from Fair Havens, and have met with the same fortune as they did.

14. But not long after there arose against it a tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon. 15. And when the ship was caught, and could not bear up into the wind, we let her drive.

It is said that on that coast southerly winds almost invariably shift to a violent northerly wind. It came on to blow fiercely from north-north-east, and continued in the same quarter for a fortnight at least. Soon the friendly shores of Crete disappeared, and they were out in the stormy sea far from any help. If we have to cross the seas, let us remember that God is in every place to hear the prayers of His servants. Heaven is as near by water as by land. The fiercest storm is but an instrument in our loving Father's hands.

16. And running under a certain island which is called Clauda, we had much work to come by the boat: 17. which when they had taken up, they used helps, undergirding the ship; and, fearing lest they should fall into the quicksands, strake sail, and so were driven.

They made all preparations to meet this gale, taking up the boat, passing a cable round the ship to keep the planks from starting, and lowering the heavy yards; then all they sought was to keep well off the land. How many tales of trouble, and fear, and patience the great sea hides, which never have come to men's ears! How many souls have committed themselves to God amidst the roar of winds and waters! A time will come when the sea will give up her dead, and we shall learn the secrets which it now hides from us.

18. And we being exceedingly tossed with a tempest, the next day they lightened the ship; 19. and the third day we cast out with our own hands the tackling of the ship. 20. And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved was then taken away.

Those who have been in dangerous storms at sea tell us of the misery they have been in; the constant strain of mind and body, the hard, hopeless labour required of all, the benumbing cold and wet, the impossibility of getting a comfortable meal, and to this was added in ancient days entire ignorance of their course, when the sailors could take no observations of sun or stars. Since those times the mariner's compass has been found out, which enables ships to steer amidst cloud and darkness, just like what God's Word does for a perplexed Christian. God's Word, too, gives us hope of the storm ceasing, as well as tells us where we are.

21. But after long abstinence Paul stood forth in the midst

of them, and said, Sirs, ye should have hearkened unto me, and not have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this harm and loss.

Many who have started on the plan of seeking their own way have wished long afterwards that they had given ear to those who spoke to them in God's Name and warned them of the dangers of life. They have felt that it would have been far greater gain to lose a few pleasant hours and gratifications and to keep a peaceful, honest path. S. Paul's unheeded warnings represent the counsel which our parents gave us, and we regarded so little. Yet he did not reproach the crew, but only reminded them of what he had said, in order to win them to listen once more.

22. And now I exhort you to be of good cheer: for there shall be no loss of any man's life among you, but of the ship.

O happy words of comfort! How much we need to hear such from the lips of God's servants! We may have lost much, but still we are God's children; He will save us, His mercy is pledged not to forsake us. Lord, enable me to speak thus to those who are inclined to give up in despair, let me be able to strengthen them by the remembrance of Thy promises.

23. For there stood by me this night the angel of God, whose I am, and whom I serve,

May not this have been the Lord of angels Himself, as in S. Paul's other visions (xviii. 9 and xxiii. 11), only to heathens, who would not understand, the apostle merely called Him an angel or Divine messenger? Jesus our Lord is not far off. He was as near to His friend in the sinking ship as amidst the former dangers in Corinth or in Jerusalem. He has stood by many a lonely sufferer in sad night-watches.

24. Saying, Fear not, Paul; thou must be brought before Caesar: and, lo, God hath given thee all them that sail with thee.

To human eyes S. Paul had been but a disregarded prisoner assigned to the centurion's or captain's charge, but in God's judgment all the officers and crew were assigned to him. He was their intercessor, counsellor, and deliverer. God blessed them all for his sake. Let our portion be with true Christians, their society will help us, their good example and prayers lift us up heavenwards. How much we owe to those good and dear friends with whom God has mercifully linked our lot!

25. Wherefore, sirs, be of good cheer: for I believe God, that it shall be even as it was told me. 26. Howbeit we must be cast upon a certain island.

This is a Christian's faith in all dangers. When the Church is distracted, or when troubles come on himself, still he believes Divine promises. Nothing can interfere with the word, the truth, the love of our heavenly Father. Whatever else is shipwrecked, yet we will not make shipwreck of our trust in Him. He will be justified in the end.

27. But when the fourteenth night was come, as we were driven up and down in Adria, about midnight the shipmen deemed that they drew near to some country;

Night had closed upon the same dreary waste of waters that had surrounded them for so long, but in the dark midnight the sailors heard the sound of breakers, or perhaps discerned them through the gloom. They could see no shore, but they could tell the sound of the surf even above the whistling of the gale. A lee-shore is a thought of fear to a sailor, yet it was a change from their dull, hopeless watching to feel they were near land at last.

28. And sounded, and found it twenty fathoms: and when they had gone a little further, they sounded again, and found it fifteen fathoms. 29. Then fearing lest we should have fallen upon rocks, they cast four anchors out of the stern, and wished for the day.

How often watchers have done that! We toss in darkness and anguish and long for the friendly light to come again, it seems so long before dawn comes. Yet the new day is near, and with it fresh instances of God's mercy. In the storm of trouble or pain we can but take the best measures possible and wait patiently for day. Everlasting light will begin to dawn before long upon this world's dark, stormy scene.

30. And as the shipmen were about to flee out of the ship, when they had let down the boat into the sea, under colour as though they would have cast anchors out of the foreship, 31. Paul said to the centurion and to the soldiers, Except these abide in the ship, ye cannot be saved.

But God had promised that they should be saved. True, but God bids us use all necessary means to fulfil His promises. He would not have us stand idly by, and expect Him to save us by miracle. S. Paul knew that the ship could not be brought to shore if the crew deserted her. Their skill was needed.

32. Then the soldiers cut off the ropes of the boat, and let her fall off.

Away went the boat into the raging sea, and was either swamped or dashed to pieces on the rocks. The crew seemed to have lost their only hope of safety. How they must have murmured against the

apostle, or at least borne a deep grudge against him ! After the shipwreck was over, and all lives saved, then they must have seen that they had great reason to thank him for his wise counsel.

33. And while the day was coming on, Paul besought them all to take meat, saying, This day is the fourteenth day that ye have tarried and continued fasting, having taken nothing.

34. Wherefore I pray you to take some meat : for this is for your health : for there shall not an hair fall from the head of any of you.

Positions had quite changed now. It is the prisoner who sets his guards free from despair, he takes the lead in giving comfort and courage to all. They obey his orders willingly. To escape from the sinking ship they would need all their strength, therefore he entreats them to take food, which they had so long neglected to do. Is not this like a Christian minister who entreats people to come to the Holy Sacrament, which is the food of the soul ? He encourages them to draw near, bids them seek God's mercy at His Holy Table.

35. And when he had thus spoken, he took bread, and gave thanks to God in presence of them all : and when he had broken it, he began to eat.

S. Paul was not ashamed to return thanks to God for his food in the presence of heathens, and he rebukes us, who are often ashamed to do this before other professing Christians. Too often we enjoy our heavenly Father's mercies without one thought of Him. He spreads our table daily, and makes our food pleasant to us.

36. Then were they all of good cheer, and they also took some meat. 37. And we were in all in the ship two hundred threescore and sixteen souls.

Day was dawning on their pale, haggard faces as they sat or stood on the wet deck and took their breakfast. All the crew and passengers were gathered there, eagerly scanning the shore and reckoning their chances of escape. They were heartened now, both by their meal and by S. Paul's good spirits. They saw he believed in their deliverance, and his faith communicated itself to them.

38. And when they had eaten enough, they lightened the ship, and cast out the wheat into the sea.

They threw out the cargo willingly, so as to give them a better chance of nearing shore. This reminds us that in times of trial God bids us part with much that we valued, sooner lose that than lose our souls. In comparison with life itself all precious stores seem worthless, so should all this world's honours and riches in comparison with our faith.

39. And when it was day, they knew not the land: but they discovered a certain creek with a shore, into the which they were minded, if it were possible, to thrust in the ship. 40. And when they had taken up the anchors, they committed themselves unto the sea, and loosed the rudder bands, and hoised up the mainsail to the wind, and made toward shore.

Here is the good ship sailing on again for the last time ; her voyages are almost over now ; her only harbour is the beach, where she will soon go to pieces. Lord, when our last voyage comes, leave us not ; whether we are sailing then in rough weather or in smooth, be Thou our Pilot, though unseen. Dispose all things for our salvation. All our skill and wisdom will fail us then when we come to that unknown passage.

41. And falling into a place where two seas met, they ran the ship aground; and the forepart stuck fast, and remained unmoveable, but the hinder part was broken with the violence of the waves.

The great ship, after all her adventures, now runs fast on a sandbank and soon begins to break up. She reminds us of great and successful lives which encounter dangers, triumph over opposition, gather riches and followers, but in the end fall into disgrace and ruin, or at least into six feet of earth. How great their splendour was in bright weather and with a fair breeze, but now all is come to ruin ! Those are happy who have cast anchor within the veil, where no violent waves can reach.

42. And the soldiers' counsel was to kill the prisoners, lest any of them should swim out, and escape.

Here is a new danger, worse than all the rest, not only waves, and storm, and crashing planks, but the soldiers' swords. Still even these are in our Father's hand. He can still the madness of the people as well as the noise of roaring waves. Whatever seems to threaten us, we must not lose our trust in Him.

43. But the centurion, willing to save Paul, kept them from their purpose; and commanded that they which could swim should cast themselves first into the sea, and get to land: 44. and the rest, some on boards, and some on broken pieces of the ship. And so it came to pass, that they escaped all safe to land.

This was a wonderful escape, wearied and worn out as they were, and in such a troubled sea. S. Paul's prayers, and those of the universal Church offered up for him, brought it about. Soldiers, and sailors, and prisoners all owed their lives to him, and yet scarcely knew it. This was the fourth time he had been shipwrecked (2 Cor. xi. 25). What a sense he must have had of God's wonders in the deep!

CHAPTER XXVIII.

1. Paul after his shipwreck is kindly entertained of the barbarians. 5.
 The viper on his hand hurteth him not. 8. He healeth many diseases in the island. 11. They depart towards Rome. 17. He declareth to the Jews the cause of his coming. 24. After his preaching some were persuaded, and some believed not. 30. Yet he preacheth there two years.

AND when they were escaped, then they knew that the island was called Melita.

S. Paul's voyage has taken him past one country that is now a British possession, Cyprus (xxvii. 4), and now it has landed him on another, Malta. Many English soldiers and travellers know this island well. God's Providence has planted the British flag widely throughout the world. He would have us English-speaking people carry the light of His Gospel abroad and show it forth in our lives. How grievously our sins have hindered the spread of His truth! how much reason we have given foreigners to blaspheme, when they have seen the scandals of our lives!

2. And the barbarous people shewed us no little kindness: for they kindled a fire, and received us every one, because of the present rain, and because of the cold.

God give us compassionate hearts. These natives were full of kindness for the wet and shivering sailors. Their charity rebukes us, who put up too readily with the sufferings of our brethren. They remind us how many aged and infirm people suffer from the cold in winter-time and call for our succour.

3. And when Paul had gathered a bundle of sticks, and laid them on the fire, there came a viper out of the heat, and fastened on his hand.

The saint was never idle. He set to work at once to gather fagots for the fire. His thankfulness for the escape, his prayers, his visions from on high, never hindered him from common duties. He would approve of diligence in all our work. We must not think any honest labour too mean for us. Those are happiest whose employment is to work with their hands, and who have strength and health for it.

4. And when the barbarians saw the venomous beast hang on his hand, they said among themselves, No doubt this man is a murderer, whom, though he hath escaped the sea, yet vengeance suffereth not to live.

The natives had a notion of Divine justice, and that sin would not go unpunished, therefore this poisonous snake appeared to them to be a minister of God's wrath. Indeed it is quite true that our sins find us out, yet we cannot always argue from sufferings here to the sufferer's guilt ; nor, again, had the Maltese heard of Divine mercy, which can wipe out the decrees of vengeance and pardon sinners.

- 5. And he shook off the beast into the fire, and felt no harm.
6. Howbeit they looked when he should have swollen, or fallen down dead suddenly : but after they had looked a great while, and saw no harm come to him, they changed their minds, and said that he was a god.*

Here is our Saviour's promise to His friends (Mark xvi. 18) come true. The serpent fell off S. Paul's hand into the fire, and he was no worse for it. So it is when we repel fiery temptations, they hurt us not ; let them come as fierce and as many as Satan wills, yet by faith and prayer we may shake them off. We must not be surprised at being attacked by them, just as S. Paul was attacked by this serpent, our Master will keep us safe.

- 7. In the same quarters were possessions of the chief man of the island, whose name was Publius ; who received us, and lodged us three days courteously.*

Publius did not know that his charity to the shipwrecked crew would cause his name to be handed down in Scripture to all nations, nor, indeed, that it would bring recovery to his aged father ; he only obeyed his compassionate heart, which bade him feed and succour the distressed. He did not consider the inconvenience and expense of such an invasion of sailors, soldiers, and prisoners, but took them all in till they could get lodgings provided.

- 8. And it came to pass, that the father of Publius lay sick of a fever and of a bloody flux : to whom Paul entered in, and prayed, and laid his hands on him, and healed him.*

This reminds us of our Saviour's acts of mercy. He had promised that His disciples should do this (Mark xvi. 18) as well as take up serpents without harm ; both came true in S. Paul's case. Diseases were miraculously healed by Christ the Lord and His servants, as a figure of that inward healing, that Divine gift for the soul, which they had to impart. Grace would heal us in soul now and body hereafter.

- 9. So when this was done, others also, which had diseases in the island, came, and were healed : 10. who also honoured us with many honours ; and when we departed, they laded us with such things as were necessary.*

Here are grateful hearts. They could not sufficiently repay the

apostle for his mercy to their sick friends. I wish I was more prompt in remembering the many kindnesses and comforts which I have received from others' hands. Alas! I have become forgetful of the old days when I myself was so dependent on kindness.

11. And after three months we departed in a ship of Alexandria, which had wintered in the isle, whose sign was Castor and Pollux.

One ship had taken S. Paul from Cæsarea to Myra, a second from Myra to the scene of the wreck, now a third, called the Castor and Pollux, after certain heathen deities, takes him for the last part of the voyage, from Malta to Puteoli. In contrast to the other two parts of his voyage this one was short, speedy, and prosperous. Less than a week landed him on the shore of Italy. After the contrary winds and dangers of the sea came a time of favouring weather again.

*12. And landing at Syracuse, we tarried there three days.
13. And from thence we fetched a compass, and came to Rhegium: and after one day the south wind blew, and we came the next day to Puteoli: 14. where we found brethren, and were desired to tarry with them seven days: and so we went toward Rome.*

Puteoli was a great seaport town, not far from Naples. Here the voyage ended, and the apostle came on shore. But the Gospel had got there before him. There were Christians there who knew and loved S. Paul, and made him stop with them over the Lord's Day. I suppose the Christians at Puteoli had to do their work in the docks, or factories, or shops of the busy town. They were little regarded by the wealthy or great men of the place, but God loved them, Christ Jesus fed them with His Body and Blood, God's Spirit breathed in their hearts. They had a secret of peace which their pagan neighbours knew not.

15. And from thence, when the brethren heard of us, they came to meet us as far as Appii forum, and The three taverns: whom when Paul saw, he thanked God, and took courage.

These Roman Christians came either forty miles to Appii Forum, or thirty miles to Tres Tabernæ. No doubt they were some of the same whose names we read at the end of the Epistle to the Romans, written three years before this time. They must have felt great delight at seeing the apostle, whose written words they had so admired; and he, on his part, returned thanks to God for their love, and gained strength by it. Sympathy was precious to him. Long imprisonment, and daily trials, and coming dangers, all became easier to bear in the thought of so many loving hearts. What a great gift it is when we have those who love us and feel for us! Our heavenly Father has nothing more precious.

16. And when we came to Rome, the centurion delivered the prisoners to the captain of the guard: but Paul was suffered to dwell by himself with a soldier that kept him.

Here is S. Paul in the capital of the world. He is but a prisoner and little noticed. Mighty emperors, victorious conquerors, made their entry into the great city with triumph, but the apostle had a wider dominion, and fiercer enemies to overcome, and greater victories to win. He still gives laws to Christians, still leads them after him along the heavenly way. His prayers in heaven, his words on earth, are undying, while all the glory of soldiers and sovereigns has mouldered into dust. We have observed in this Book of the Acts the Gospel planted in Jerusalem, and in Antioch, and in Corinth, and in Ephesus; now we have reached a fifth city, far greater than the rest, and no doubt God had much people there also.

17. And it came to pass, that after three days Paul called the chief of the Jews together: and when they were come together, he said unto them, Men and brethren, though I have committed nothing against the people, or customs of our fathers, yet was I delivered prisoner from Jerusalem into the hands of the Romans.

S. Paul set to work at once to do his Master's business. His heart and tongue were free, though his limbs were chained. He called for his Jewish countrymen to come to him, that he might, as he always did, preach to them first of all. Give us, Lord, a spark of that unwearied zeal and love which neither bonds, nor weakness, nor age, nor danger could quench. Let it rebuke our cold, sluggish days. A hundred times over he had failed to persuade the Jews, yet he never loses hope of winning souls from among them.

18. Who, when they had examined me, would have let me go, because there was no cause of death in me. 19. But when the Jews spake against it, I was constrained to appeal unto Cæsar; not that I had ought to accuse my nation of.

They had tried to murder him, had sought his life with eager hatred and outrages, were the cause of all his troubles, yet he had not so much as an ill word for them. It was against his will and by sheer necessity he had appealed to the Emperor. He felt for his nation in their great perils, and would do nothing to aggravate their case. What an admirable forgiveness of injuries, what long-suffering patience! How entirely the apostle remembered that he was a Jew and held Jewish faith!

20. For this cause therefore have I called for you, to see you, and to speak with you: because that for the hope of Israel I am bound with this chain.

The hope of Israel was a righteous King, a reign of peace and love, an outpouring of true forgiveness, a spiritual worship and law written in the heart. The prophets had told of this glorious hope under many figures. It was a grievous mistake for Israelites to set their hopes on some earthly deliverer who would rule by material weapons. Christ the Lord had a better enlargement, a truer peace, than this world's swords could win.

21. And they said unto him, We neither received letters out of Judaea concerning thee, neither any of the brethren that came shewed or spake any harm of thee.

How had their sleepless malice failed in this? Probably the letters or accusers had been delayed by the great storm, and so not yet reached Rome. I fear they had not changed their minds or recognised the apostle's innocence. It is almost impossible, when we have given way to hatred of any one, to return to a fair judgment concerning him. Hatred blinds the eyes and stops the ears. God keep us from it.

22. But we desire to hear of thee what thou thinkest: for as concerning this sect, we know that every where it is spoken against.

What a strange account of the Catholic Church of Christ! It is to these Jews a sect everywhere spoken against. They wished to hear more about the Christian faith, yet said that it was everywhere opposed. Glory to God for planting it everywhere! Never mind its being spoken against; there will be plenty soon that will speak for it when they have experienced its saving power. Human wisdom, prejudice, the might of this world, all were against the Gospel, yet it triumphed by Divine help.

23. And when they had appointed him a day, there came many to him into his lodging; to whom he expounded and testified the kingdom of God, persuading them concerning Jesus, both out of the law of Moses, and out of the prophets, from morning till evening.

No doubt the apostle delighted in this opportunity, prepared for it with prayer, managed it with heavenly wisdom. It was a hard day's work for him, yet he knew no fatigue when he was speaking of his dear Lord and Saviour. On that subject he could be indeed eloquent. That is the way to be able to persuade others concerning Jesus, to believe in and love Him yourself as S. Paul did.

24. And some believed the things which were spoken, and some believed not.

Dear friends, why is this? Some believe in the Gospel promises and warnings, take Christ for their Saviour, obey His holy Law.

Others there are who hold aloof, and will have neither part nor lot with us. Why is this strange difference? Indeed I know not. I must leave it in His hands Who holds the key of hearts. One thing I know for myself is that when I hate sin, and love holiness, and am merciful and true, then faith comes home to me. It is my own sins that shut out the light from my soul. I dare not say that this is the case with all, but I myself have found it so.

25. And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, 26. saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive: 27. for the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.

This is the passage which is quoted more frequently in the New Testament than any other, and it is a warning to the dishonest hearer. It predicts blindness to the wilfully blind, deafness to the unheeding, callousness to the indifferent. When Isaiah saw the awful vision of God, and heard of His great judgments to come on the land, many despised the message; and so it has been ever since. They cared not to hear, and so God left off caring for them. O terrible mystery of judgment, which we have seen come true!

28. Be it known therefore unto you, that the salvation of God is sent unto the Gentiles, and that they will hear it. 29. And when he had said these words, the Jews departed, and had great reasoning among themselves.

S. Paul never forgot his commission, which was to preach the Gospel to the Gentiles. He would not try to win favour with the Jews by concealing that. The interests of Gentile believers were ever present to his mind. His imprisonment had not damped his hopes of converting the world. Imperial Rome seemed to him a grand field for conversions. He had perfect confidence in the power of Divine grace to back his words.

30. And Paul dwelt two whole years in his own hired house, and received all that came in unto him,

Here is a time of rest, after all the changes and perils of the history. Indeed there was much restraint laid on the apostle, and the expectation of his trial to come hung over him; yet he was able to spread the Gospel by word and writing. During these two years he wrote the Epistles to the Philippians, to the Ephesians, Colossians, and to Philemon, as well as preached. It is a time of quiet, the

great Jewish persecutions of the faith are over, and those from Imperial Rome not yet begun. Bloodier trials, greater dangers, soon came. Still the Christians glorified God for these two years of peace. They did great things for their Master in that time.

31. Preaching the kingdom of God, and teaching those things which concern the Lord Jesus Christ, with all confidence, no man forbidding him.

We have now finished our journeys with the apostle. His example should have taught us something of courage, of patience, of a noble disinterestedness. Though he is no longer here in the flesh, yet we are able to follow his holy footsteps and study what manner of man he was. We ought to be the better for such a view. This Book of the Acts contains the beginning of the history of Christ's Church, which will last on till the Judgment Day. Christ's kingdom has defeats now as well as victories, has its dark days, its troubles and divisions, yet her Lord is always to be found by those who seek Him. Lord, when we read of Thy old saints, we pray—

"Strengthen us to run our race
With a portion of their grace,
That when Thou shalt come with dread,
Judging both the quick and dead,
They with us, and we with them,
May attain Thy diadem."

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE ROMANS.

CHAPTER I.

1. Paul commendeth his calling to the Romans, 9. and his desire to come to them. 16. What his gospel is, and the righteousness which it sheweth. 18. God is angry with all manner of sin. 21. What were the sins of the Gentiles.

PAUL, *a servant of Jesus Christ, called to be an apostle, separated unto the gospel of God,*

Paul was a Christian, and so owned Jesus for his Master ; he was an apostle, and so had power and authority from the Lord Himself ; he was set apart to preach the good news of salvation to all nations, and so had a message to bring to his Roman readers. He is writing to us also. The deep mysteries and rich promises of this Epistle are a gift sent from God to us through the apostle's hands. How many thousand Christians have read this Epistle with burning hearts, have found comfort, and strength, and peace in it, and there are still left treasures of grace for us to draw from !

2. (*Which he had promised afore by his prophets in the holy scriptures,*)

God's Gospel is old, and yet new ; freshly brought down from heaven, and yet foretold and longed for through all the ages. The Holy Scriptures are indeed very different in their various parts, and yet they are all one book and one whole, by their revelation of one God, and their call to a holy life, and the good news of salvation to which they all lead. Let Scripture be my guide, and I too shall find and enjoy the blessings of which God's saints have spoken.

3. *Concerning his Son Jesus Christ our Lord, which was made of the seed of David according to the flesh;*

This was our Lord's human birth, when He was born of Mary into this visible world to suffer and to die for us. He came of the Jewish nation, of David's family, and lived according to all the conditions of our mortal life. Let us cheerfully embrace the cares and sorrows of this world, now that God's Son has stooped to share them with us ; His sacred humanity and holy life are full of Divine comfort for our souls.

4. And declared to be the Son of God with power, according to the spirit of holiness, by the resurrection from the dead :

This was His glorious new birth out of death, when He showed His Divine Power by leaving the grave and entering on a new life never to die again. Now He can raise our souls to live a heavenly life, and one day He will raise our bodies also after the likeness of His Body. Up to the Resurrection Christ's Divine nature was veiled, then it shone forth in all its glory. As it comforts us to read of His mortal life, so it strengthens us to read of His victory over death.

5. By whom we have received grace and apostleship, for obedience to the faith among all nations, for his name :

Both our own conversion and the power of winning souls to believe are gifts of God's mercy through Christ. His Name means His nature, His power, His love, His death, and all the strength that lies hid in these mysteries. If our Master is such as this, shall we not delight to obey and believe, submitting our reason to His Word? When God speaks, what should frail man do but obey? All nations alike have their part in this gracious message.

6. Among whom are ye also the called of Jesus Christ :

Paul's apostleship still lasts on, and we are among his hearers. His work remains, and his letters and sermons still teach. Many souls have been left in darkness, knowing nothing of the Gospel; but our dear Lord has of His infinite mercy called us into His Church, and made us partakers of His mysteries and promises. What thanks can we give that shall be worthy of His undeserved mercy!

7. To all that be in Rome, beloved of God, called to be saints : Grace to you and peace from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

I can rest on God's love, which will never forsake me ; but I must strive also to be a saint according to my calling. How little I have thought of my Father's love, of my Saviour's gracious work, or of the holiness to which I am pledged as a Christian. Believers in the apostles' days enjoyed great treasures of blessing, knew what their calling meant, fought a good fight against all manner of evil. Why is my heart so cold and often so foul?

8. First, I thank my God through Jesus Christ for you all, that your faith is spoken of throughout the whole world.

S. Paul was careful to give thanks for blessings received ; this is very much wanting in my devotions. I ask, but forget to thank God for the answer, and so my thankless heart hinders His gifts from descending afresh. S. Paul gives thanks first of all for his readers' faith ; not that he forgot to ask for or return thanks for this world's

blessings, but he thought that a true faith was the greatest treasure of all. What profit are all other gifts without faith in Christ?

9. For God is my witness, whom I serve with my spirit in the gospel of his Son, that without ceasing I make mention of you always in my prayers ; 10. making request, if by any means now at length I might have a prosperous journey by the will of God to come unto you.

God alone knew his prayers, and how he longed to see his brethren at Rome, of whom he had so often heard. True Christians will find many subjects for prayer; they will bring them forward, as Paul did, constantly and earnestly, and in entire submission to God's will. Our part is to believe and pray. He can make our way prosperous, and can join together those who are parted here. If we may not meet on earth, yet there is a home above where God's servants will see each other.

11. For I long to see you, that I may impart unto you some spiritual gift, to the end ye may be established ;

God has intrusted to His ministers spiritual gifts for the benefit of the whole body. Those who know their own weakness will be ready to seek God's grace through the means that He has appointed. Thanks be to God, Who has bestowed upon our needy souls many gifts and mercies, and has given us teachers, books, sacraments, and examples.

12. That is, that I may be comforted together with you by the mutual faith both of you and me.

That would be profitable intercourse, where each did the other good ; they would speak not of business, nor amusement, far less talk scandal or gossip, but would comfort each other by speaking of their common Lord and His goodness. When each found how firmly the other believed in Jesus the Son of God, he would himself take courage to bear and suffer more bravely.

13. Now I would not have you ignorant, brethren, that oftentimes I purposed to come unto you, (but was let hitherto,) that I might have some fruit among you also, even as among other Gentiles.

The fruit Paul sought to find was more souls won to Christ, more love of God, more devotion ; all his journeys had this for their object. He did not visit strange countries for amusement or for riches, but solely to gather in believers ; yet even in this work he knew how to submit his own will to God, and to recognise hindrances as well as helps as being from Him.

14. I am debtor both to the Greeks, and to the Barbarians ; both to the wise, and to the unwise.

Greeks had to lay aside their wisdom and find greater depths of truth in the Gospel. Barbarians had to overcome their simplicity and learn heavenly wisdom instead. The Christian teacher should find a message for all his flock ; the wisest have much to learn about the Lord Jesus, the simplest can learn something. How wonderful it is that Holy Scripture so suits itself to all capacities and conditions !

15. So, as much as in me is, I am ready to preach the gospel to you that are at Rome also.

The great capital, with its court, its splendour, its power, did not frighten him. Idolatry had its stronghold there, men lived there in great wealth, sin and cruelty ruled there ; but Paul knew his Master's power and love, and the preciousness of the Gospel. Great Rome had no terrors and no fascinations for one who felt thus ; all he saw in it was a glorious opportunity for faith.

16. For I am not ashamed of the gospel of Christ : for it is the power of God unto salvation to every one that believeth ; to the Jew first, and also to the Greek.

Is it not power ? It can make the foolish wise, the sinful holy, the wretched happy ; it opens to mankind a spring of blessing of which nature knows nothing. Let us only believe, and we too shall feel the effects of this Divine power which has been revealed to save mankind. Indeed I know my own weakness from long and sad experience, but the Gospel tells me of God's power, which is more able to save me than I am to ruin myself.

17. For therein is the righteousness of God revealed from faith to faith : as it is written, The just shall live by faith.

God's righteousness means what He gives and approves, that inward peace, purity of heart, and hope of pardon, which all this world's treasures cannot buy. Those who enjoy it know its sweetness ; it is their true life even here, and one day will come to full perfection. The life of the body or of the mind will soon grow weak, but the life of faith once begun in the soul lasts on through death.

18. For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness ;

God's wrath falls on those who know the truth but live in sin. If this is so with the heathen who knew so little of God's truth, what shall we say, who know so much and yet deny it by our lives ? His wrath falls from heaven upon sinners ; none may presume to escape unpunished.

19. Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them ; for God hath shewed it unto them. 20. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly

seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse:

Creation is like a great book in which we may read of God's goodness, power, and wisdom ; all the creatures cry out that He made them. Those men are blind and deaf who will not heed this witness. Yet if the testimony of the creatures is so clear as to leave ungodly men without excuse for neglecting the God of nature, what excuse have those who have despised the Gospel message, which is far more clear, more full, more persuasive than all that nature could offer ?

21. Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened.

To glorify God and give Him thanks is the best occupation of all, and most worthy of man. How great He is ! how abundant have been His mercies to me ! I am indeed dull and foolish if I forget my heavenly Father. It was thus the heathen went wrong, and if I neglect Him, surely I may expect my mind to become full of vanity and my heart of darkness. My safeguard is to seek Him daily.

22. Professing themselves to be wise, they became fools, 23. and changed the glory of the uncorruptible God into an image made like to corruptible man, and to birds, and fourfooted beasts, and creeping things.

God has mercifully delivered us from this bondage. We know better now than to worship images, or beasts, or birds, and yet there are some who are even more foolish than idolaters ; they make it their glory to live without God at all ; they profess to be wise, and yet despise and even revile the great God, His house and His servants. What folly is this, for a weak creature to set himself against God's glorious Majesty !

24. Wherefore God also gave them up to uncleanness through the lusts of their own hearts, to dishonour their own bodies between themselves : 25. who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator, who is blessed for ever. Amen.

True religion is the best of all safeguards against sin. Fear of men or respect for our own position are but weak restraints ; only the true fear and love of God Almighty, Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, can keep us safe when fiery temptations assail us. Let me always believe firmly in God's truth, and join in His worship, and approach His holy altar devoutly, so shall I be safe in the hour of trial.

26. For this cause God gave them up unto vile affections : for even their women did change the natural use into that which is against nature : 27. and likewise also the men, leaving the

natural use of the woman, burned in their lust one toward another ; men with men working that which is unseemly, and receiving in themselves that recompence of their error which was meet.

O my God, I mourn the corruption of my heart. If I were left to myself, into what depths of evil should I not fall! If God's grace were to give me up, I should perish utterly, and drag down others to hell with me, but I trust in that loving mercy which has so far held me up and brought me back. When temptation comes upon me I fly for refuge to my Saviour, and find purity and strength in Him.

28. And even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient ;

Lord, teach the young to distrust their own judgment. Thy wisdom is our only sure light, and without Thee manifest folly is taken for a guide. Lord, abate the spirit of pride in us, and teach us to take Thy Word for a guide ; so shall we be safe, and find the right way. The humble, and meek, and pure-hearted are led by heavenly wisdom, while the proud go astray.

29. Being filled with all unrighteousness, fornication, wickedness, covetousness, malice ; full of envy, murder, debate, deceit, malignity ; whisperers, 30. backbiters, haters of God, despiteful, proud, boasters, inventors of evil things, disobedient to parents, 31. without understanding, covenantbreakers, without natural affection, implacable, unmerciful :

These evil passions were the consequences of a life without God. Pride, unbelief, greediness for pleasure or riches, grew upon men, and led them to break down all the barriers of law and custom. Such is still man's nature, there is no evil of which he is not capable. Indeed God's grace gives a new heart and makes a new life possible, but if we wilfully fall away from that, we may plunge ourselves into worse ruin than the heathen found. How hateful, how cruel, how foul, how mean, how impudent are the lives which some men lead ! Yes, my soul, and what would be thy condition if God's restraining grace were for an instant withdrawn ?

32. Who knowing the judgment of God, that they which commit such things are worthy of death, not only do the same, but have pleasure in them that do them.

This is worst of all, to delight in and encourage the growth of sin. This brings the guilt of others' ruin upon us, when they are led into evil by our flattery and encouragement. This verse reminds all those who are set over their brethren of the great judgment that they will bring on themselves if they give a bad example. They

know what is right, they are bound to rebuke and correct and plead with transgressors, but what if they themselves show the downward way? The burden of those sins which our brethren have committed through our bad influence will be an awful addition to our own faults in the day of judgment.

CHAPTER II.

1. They that sin, though they condemn it in others, cannot excuse themselves, 6, and much less escape the judgment of God, 9, whether they be Jews or Gentiles. 14. The Gentiles cannot escape, 17, nor yet the Jews, 25, whom their circumcision shall not profit, if they keep not the law.

THHEREFORE thou art inexcusable, O man, whosoever thou art that judgest: for wherein thou judgest another, thou condemnest thyself; for thou that judgest doest the same things.

We see our brethren's faults, and blame them sharply; but God sees our own. He knows the many shortcomings, the graces despised, the opportunities lost, the failure to do good, which our life presents. How strange it is that faults which look so vile in others should seem so excusable in myself! Do not I live as in a dream, making profession of righteousness, but living for my own pleasure?

2. But we are sure that the judgment of God is according to truth against them which commit such things.

God will judge according to truth, nothing can escape Him. Should I not fear this judgment myself, and try to bring it home to men's hearts? Reason and faith both join to teach this lesson, that God will be our Judge. In this life flattery, or passion, or interest may blind men's eyes, but there is One Who sees all things as they are. I commit my cause to Him in fear, and yet in hope.

3. And thinkest thou this, O man, that judgest them which do such things, and doest the same, that thou shalt escape the judgment of God?

We know what is right, and yet do wrong as readily as if there was no judgment to come. Some men seem to think they have a privilege; they do not think themselves liable to the common judgment of mankind; they say that their position, or wealth, or their easy nature, or the temptations they had, take away their guilt. What flimsy excuses these are! we shall not dare to utter them when we stand before our Judge.

4. Or despisest thou the riches of his goodness and forbear-

ance and longsuffering ; not knowing that the goodness of God leadeth thee to repentance ?

Indeed God bears long with sinners, but it is not because He does not heed, or cannot punish ; it is only of His mercy, desiring to bring them to repentance. What a wealth of forbearance He has shown to me ! I acknowledge His mercy in bearing with me, in restraining me, in leading me back, in guiding me along the way. Let me not despise this mercy, but walk carefully now, remembering that my salvation is wholly in His hands.

5. But after thy hardness and impenitent heart treasures up unto thyself wrath against the day of wrath and revelation of the righteous judgment of God ;

A long course of sin hardens the heart ; little faith is left, or love, or even fear, only a stupid carelessness, which goes on heaping up more and more sin. Riches of mercy despised will turn into treasures of wrath ready to burst upon the head of the impenitent. Even in this life sin finds us out. How many criminals have had a terrible experience of God's judgments ! but there remains a great recompense to come.

6. Who will render to every man according to his deeds :

A short but weighty verse ; it gives comfort, and yet makes us fear. God will forget no patience, no love, no sacrifice, but yet He remembers our evil deeds. He treats men not according to their calling, or nation, or esteem in the world, but as they each of them truly are. All our deeds are written down in His book, and He remembers, even though we have forgotten.

7. To them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for glory and honour and immortality, eternal life :

We must seek for these precious things, if we would find them ; we must continue patiently doing well ; we must ask God for His gift of eternal life. One who seeks for the glory of heaven, for the honour that God gives, for a state where corruption cannot enter, will not be overmuch moved by the world's promises or threatenings. He knows of something more important. Lord, guide me in this search, let me find the good things that this verse speaks of, not in the empty praise of men, but in the truth and reality of Thy judgment.

8. But unto them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath, 9. tribulation and anguish, upon every soul of man that doeth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile ;

When God speaks let us obey ; we must open our hearts wide to Divine truth, and let it enter in and be our rule and guide. If we

wilfully despise the easy yoke of God's Law, we shall have to bear instead a great weight of wrath, misery, and despair, from which will be no escape. The conscience of many sinners has agreed to the truth of these words. They have found too late the ruin which they had brought on themselves. Let us not prove these words, but believe in their truth and be warned. Evil deeds bring misery, sooner or later. Such is the unalterable rule which God has laid down.

10. But glory, honour, and peace, to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile :

It would be a foolish choice to prefer this world's glory, honour, and peace to that which God offers. Glory from men's tongues, honour from their gifts, peace from a prosperous and wealthy condition, are all mere shadows ; they will pass away when the true Light shines. A good life, inspired by God's grace, and sprinkled with Christ's Blood, is the only road that leads to peace.

11. For there is no respect of persons with God.

Hearts are open before Him, He rewards right, He punishes wrong. Rank and position, and all the many disguises which men wear, have no existence in His sight. Do your duty in whatever place you are, and look to your heavenly Master for a just and merciful reward.

12. For as many as have sinned without law shall also perish without law : and as many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law ; 13. (for not the hearers of the law are just before God, but the doers of the law shall be justified.

God leaves no one without some law, those who have not His written Word have their own conscience. He speaks to us all, and bids us live justly, speak truth, and show mercy. It is not our profession, but our practice that He regards. Lord, write this holy Law of Thine in my heart by Thy Spirit, that I may see it clearly and rejoice in it, and give my whole life to fulfil it. What profit will it be to me to have heard God's Word so often unless I take it for my guide?

14. For when the Gentiles, which have not the law, do by nature the things contained in the law, these, having not the law, are a law unto themselves : 15. which shew the work of the law written in their hearts, their conscience also bearing witness, and their thoughts the mean while accusing or else excusing one another,)

The law of duty speaks to us of God. What is the peace that I feel in giving up sin, what is the misery and shame that I feel when I have done wrong, but a reflection from my heavenly Father's

judgment-seat? Perhaps no one else may accuse our evil ways, but the still small voice of conscience will not be put by. Wretched are those who have hardened their hearts and stifled the voice so that they hear it no more. Let me rather listen to it in quiet moments, and do its bidding; then it will guide me more truly and plainly still.

16. In the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ according to my gospel.

God will open in that day two books, the one of our own conscience, and the other of His holy Word, and will judge us by them. All secret things will be disclosed, all crooked ways declared openly. God's judgment is part of the Gospel. His Word does not merely speak of love and hope, but also of recompense. I have no business to take to myself its sweet promises and forget its righteous requirements. The judgment goes on secretly now, but one day it will be fully known.

17. Behold, thou art called a Jew, and restest in the law, and makest thy boast of God, 18. and knowest his will, and approvest the things that are more excellent, being instructed out of the law;

I am called a Christian. I rest on the promises of the Gospel. I boast of Christ's death suffered for me. I know God's will through Scripture and the Church. Christian teaching and examples have abounded round me. I have learned that vice is hateful and holiness honourable. Alas! what shall I gain from all these privileges unless my life agrees with my calling?

19. And art confident that thou thyself art a guide of the blind, a light of them which are in darkness, 20. an instructor of the foolish, a teacher of babes, which hast the form of knowledge and of the truth in the law.

How dangerous is knowledge without love! Those who have powers of mind, who are set over their brethren, who know and teach God's will, who are looked up to and followed by many, have the heavier account to give. Happy are those whose path lies in obscurity, and who are not tempted to lord it over others! Jews in old time despised Gentiles for their ignorance; learned and clever Christians are apt to despise simple ones, but God reckons by a different standard from men.

21. Thou therefore which teachest another, teachest thou not thyself? thou that preachest a man should not steal, dost thou steal?

Often we hand on Divine truth like a postman does a letter. It may contain treasures of wisdom or comfort, but his part merely is to

pass it on without profiting by it. That is his duty, but it is our misfortune to treat the Gospel so. It bids us who speak of it profit by it first. Our souls and bodies belong to God, let us learn to render them wholly to Him to be used for His service. Why should Satan steal what has been once consecrated to heavenly uses?

22. Thou that sayest a man should not commit adultery, dost thou commit adultery? thou that abhorrest idols, dost thou commit sacrilege?

Impurity of heart and irreverence of behaviour suit ill with our profession. We speak of great sins with abhorrence, and loudly blame those who commit them, but God knows what goes on within the inward temple of our hearts. How amazing the contrast is between what I cherish in my heart and what I profess with my lips!

23. Thou that makest thy boast of the law, through breaking the law dishonourest thou God?

I may enjoy a service, approve a sermon, be familiar with religious books, and yet my own duty remain undone. It is easy to make our boast of religion, but hard to subdue our tongue and temper and daily life to the Scripture pattern. Lord, write Thy Law within, and let Thy grace work in me what my own strength fails to do.

24. For the name of God is blasphemed among the Gentiles through you, as it is written.

What do unbelievers say when they observe the lives of Christians? Drunkenness, profaneness, cruelty, deadly sins of this or that sort bear rule among Christian nations, and drive off idolaters who else would be drawn to accept the Gospel. If Christian priests and people were what they ought to be, the whole world would shortly become Christian. Every sin in which I wilfully allow myself is a hindrance to religion and an insult done to my Master.

25. For circumcision verily profiteth, if thou keep the law: but if thou be a breaker of the law, thy circumcision is made uncircumcision.

What good is it to be distinguished from Jews or pagans by baptism and other Christian rites if our life is no better than theirs? The signs which consecrate us to God will only ensure our condemnation if we despise them. How many have turned their baptism and their Communions into mockery by sin! Outward partaking in holy ordinances is not the same as inward enjoyment of Christ.

26. Therefore if the uncircumcision keep the righteousness of the law, shall not his uncircumcision be counted for circumcision? 27. And shall not uncircumcision which is by nature,

if it fulfil the law, judge thee, who by the letter and circumcision dost transgress the law?

Those heathens who are truthful, merciful, upright, rebuke us whose advantages are so much greater. We have many means of grace. The Lord Jesus and His Spirit have spent treasures of mercy on us. How great will be our ruin if we allow ourselves in those sins which even the heathen know to be wrong!

28. For he is not a Jew, which is one outwardly; neither is that circumcision, which is outward in the flesh: 29. but he is a Jew, which is one inwardly; and circumcision is that of the heart, in the spirit, and not in the letter; whose praise is not of men, but of God.

Neither is he a true Christian who is baptized, who comes to church, or communicates, or speaks of his religion, but he who loves God, who strives to fulfil the Divine Law, who trusts in Divine mercy, who prays for grace and hopes for heaven. We are in God's sight just what our hearts are. He sees through the inward appearance, and values us at our real worth. How human judgments will be reversed when God makes His judgment known!

CHAPTER III.

1. The Jews' prerogative: 3. which they have not lost: 9. howbeit the law convinceth them also of sin: 20. therefore no flesh is justified by the law, 28. but all, without difference, by faith only: 31. and yet the law is not abolished.

WHAT advantage then hath the Jew? or what profit is there of circumcision?

So a doubting Christian may say, What does it profit me to have been baptized, or to attend church or Communion? Have I not the same warfare to fight, the same deadly temptations, the same troubles, the same death to undergo as the heathen, what good do I get from being a Christian? Ah, how many good thoughts, strivings of God's grace within you, opportunities of good, warnings against sin, have come to you through your Christian profession, and you have forgotten them!

2. Much every way: chiefly, because that unto them were committed the oracles of God.

The Jews had the Old Testament in their hands, we have the whole Bible, God's promises fulfilled, and His Church set up. If God's Word in old time, though veiled and given only in part, was so

precious a treasure, we ought to find our Bibles of infinite value. We see there how God has spoken to man in so many ways, but best of all, through His dear Son.

3. For what if some did not believe? shall their unbelief make the faith of God without effect?

There are some ungodly Christians, some errors which prevail among believers, does that destroy God's truth? We must not leave the Church when iniquity abounds and love grows cold, rather cling all the more closely to that society where God's grace has wrought wonders of old. His promises are still sure, His Sacraments still have a blessing, though many fall away.

4. God forbid: yea, let God be true, but every man a liar; as it is written, That thou mightest be justified in thy sayings, and mightest overcome when thou art judged.

Nothing can overthrow God's promises. Those who know their own hearts will recognise that the fault is theirs, not His. Their folly, frailty, misuse of grace, are sad and great, but greater still is that infinite love and goodness which upholds them. All that is good in them is His, all that is vile and foolish is their own.

5. But if our unrighteousness commend the righteousness of God, what shall we say? Is God unrighteous who taketh vengeance? (I speak as a man)

If my sin magnifies God's mercy, perhaps then good and bad are all alike, and there is no such thing as wrath for sinners. Such is the flattering unction which unbelief lays to our souls, making us doubt of God's righteous judgments. Can it be, we ask, that sins will verily find us out?

6. God forbid: for then how shall God judge the world?

Nay, hold fast to His righteousness, and let all else go. God must judge the world, sin will surely bring misery, those that love righteousness will be rewarded. This is the surest thing of all; never let doubts or scoffs snatch from us a firm trust in the justice of our God, to which we look to set right one day all that now seems amiss.

7. For if the truth of God hath more abounded through my lie unto his glory; why yet am I also judged as a sinner? 8. And not rather, (as we be slanderously reported, and as some affirm that we say,) Let us do evil, that good may come? whose damnation is just.

Those who abused God's mercy by taking it as a licence to sin are worthy, S. Paul says, of damnation. They turned light into darkness, and said, "The more sins we commit, the more ready is

God's good-nature to forgive us; no need to fear, though we heap sin on sin, He is sure to forgive us at last." Indeed this false reasoning too easily creeps into our heart. Let us learn not to presume on God's mercy, lest we find the door shut against us.

9. *What then? are we better than they? No, in no wise: for we have before proved both Jews and Gentiles, that they are all under sin;*

We are Christians, and enjoy the blessings of the Gospel, yet in ourselves is no good thing. We must not pride ourselves on being better than many who have not had our opportunities. The Jews were wrong in thinking that however bad a Jew might be, God would prefer him to a Gentile; and those Christians are wrong who trust in their own privileges and despise the ignorant and degraded. Alas! sin is a hard master, a cruel enemy. So long as I live in this world I must watch against it; only my Saviour's grace can deliver me from its yoke.

10. *As it is written, There is none righteous, no, not one: 11. there is none that understandeth, there is none that seeketh after God. 12. They are all gone out of the way, they are together become unprofitable; there is none that doeth good, no, not one.*

Psalm xiv. tells us how sin darkens the understanding, draws us away from God, makes us seek our own pleasure, and yet find no happiness. What word better than "unprofitable" would suit a sinner's ways? He gets no good himself, and no one gets any good from his life. How few there are who give their hearts to God and seek His ways earnestly! yet now and then we find such souls whom His grace raises above their weak nature.

13. *Their throat is an open sepulchre; with their tongues they have used deceit; the poison of asps is under their lips: 14. whose mouth is full of cursing and bitterness:*

Psalms v. and x. remind us of sins of the tongue. How bitter, how foul, how harmful is bad language! How much harm is done by lying and evil-speaking! Lord, we pray Thee, keep us from this besetting sin, help all those who are beginning life that they may not be corrupted by the vile words they hear, make us sorry for our own foolish words. Every day there goes up from the mouths of professing Christians a great storm of blasphemies towards God and injuries towards their fellow-men.

15. *Their feet are swift to shed blood: 16. destruction and misery are in their ways: 17. and the way of peace have they not known:*

Isaiah in chapter lix. speaks of a sinful life as ruinous to others, as

wretched and distracted in itself. How true this is of many who live without God! What would they not give to recover their innocent days! But all that is gone, and they live now in an unquiet, restless whirl, never daring to think. Lord, keep me in the right way; if I lose innocence I lose peace and joy too.

18. *There is no fear of God before their eyes.*

This is the beginning of Psalm xxxvi. We see what the consequence is of ceasing to fear God. There is then nothing left to keep us back from evil. Lord, plant in our hearts this gift of Thy holy fear. It is true courage to fear God, and fear sin, and fear giving pain or grief to our friends. If I fear these as I ought, I shall never be afraid of scoffs, or temptation, or danger. What can men do to me? How can death hurt me?

19. *Now we know that what things soever the law saith, it saith to them who are under the law: that every mouth may be stopped, and all the world may become guilty before God.*

Let me learn this necessary lesson, that all mankind are in a fallen state and subject to sin. Not Jewish privileges nor Gentile wisdom could set men free. How and why sin came in I cannot wholly understand, but I feel its terrible power within, and see its ravages in the world around. God is my Judge, and I have no righteousness of my own that is fit to stand in His sight.

20. *Therefore by the deeds of the law there shall no flesh be justified in his sight: for by the law is the knowledge of sin.*

The Jew thought that by earnestly performing all the rites of the Law, by fulfilling his duties, by giving alms as it enjoined, he deserved a reward from God. Nay, law could not do this for man; all it could do was to point out a road for us to walk in and mark our manifold departures from it. Something else was needed to make up for our sins, to remove our guilt, to give us new power and life. Do not rest merely on the observance of law, but seek earnestly for quickening grace.

21. *But now the righteousness of God without the law is manifested, being witnessed by the law and the prophets;*

We are happy to live in these days. Scripture foretold them, saints longed to see them. Now we have a clear view of God's righteousness and mercy, we know the way of life, we enjoy the comforts of the Holy Spirit. All the dark gloomy fears of the natural man are passed away, and the sunshine of God's grace has come instead.

22. *Even the righteousness of God which is by faith of Jesus Christ unto all and upon all them that believe: for there is no difference: 23. for all have sinned, and come short of the glory of God;*

How great is God's love! how great is my need! The depth of my misery cries out to the abundance of His mercy. What a thought for me that through faith in my dear Lord I may come one day to stand before God in perfect purity and peace! What but infinite goodness could thus overcome all my vileness?

24. Being justified freely by his grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus:

God's free mercy, Christ's infinite merits, the precious Blood, full pardon bestowed, peace and love implanted, sin and death overcome. Such are the great matters with which this verse deals. I am pardoned, set free, made God's child; all the heavy debt is wiped out, and the haunting fear gone. Lord, who is sufficient to thank Thee for this deliverance?

25. Whom God hath set forth to be a propitiation through faith in his blood, to declare his righteousness for the remission of sins that are past, through the forbearance of God; 26. to declare, I say, at this time his righteousness: that he might be just, and the justifier of him which believeth in Jesus.

Christ's Cross shows us that God is righteous and yet merciful. He has passed over many transgressions, and yet He hates sin; it is grievous in His eyes. His own Son had to suffer death in conflict with it. Our longings after holiness, our trust in a Divine love, our thoughts of some precious sacrifice, are all explained by Christ's Death. Here is the true offering which alone has power to blot out sin. Nothing is beyond its saving grace. I too, O Lord, believe in and claim this forgiveness.

27. Where is boasting then? It is excluded. By what law? of works? Nay: but by the law of faith.

We shall not be saved through the number or virtue of our works, but by trust in the loving mercy of God set forth to us in Christ. The Law of works said, "Perform so many acts of devotion, of self-denial, of obedience;" but the Law of faith says, "Feel your own unworthiness, and look up to that Holy Lord Who atones for your unworthiness and assists your weakness." Let this latter be our law, and we shall be able to walk in the right way.

28. Therefore we conclude that a man is justified by faith without the deeds of the law.

Faith can do what the Law of Moses failed to do. All those ceremonies, precepts, and warnings could not plant love in the heart; but God does this by revealing His Son to us, and bidding us share His righteousness and live by it. The deeds of Christ's Law should be found in us, though the outward deeds of Moses' Law are no longer required.

29. *Is he the God of the Jews only? is he not also of the Gentiles?* Yes, of the Gentiles also: 30. seeing it is one God, which shall justify the circumcision by faith, and uncircumcision through faith.

There is but one God and Father of all, and His way of salvation is the same for all alike. Glory be to Him for the freeness of His mercy! All men are His creatures; they can learn to obey and love Him; they can accept Christ's Death and trust in His merits. There is but one way, the road of faith; by it all saints have walked, whether before or since the Gospel. Let it be our endeavour to follow their footsteps.

31. *Do we then make void the law through faith? God forbid: yea, we establish the law.*

The Jews honoured God's Holy Law; now the Gospel did not throw contempt on that Law, but showed its true meaning and enabled men to keep the spirit of it. All the Law looked forward; it was full of type, it was veiled in figures. Jesus our Lord takes it up, and shows what it meant, and writes it within us. I too desire to obey that Law which proceeds from my Sovereign Lord, and requires the obedience of soul and body, thoughts and life and heart; yet I seek this only through Jesus Christ, and with eyes constantly fixed on Him.

CHAPTER IV.

- 1. Abraham's faith was imputed to him for righteousness, 10. before he was circumcised. 13. By faith only he and his seed received the promise. 16. Abraham is the father of all that believe. 24. Our faith also shall be imputed to us for righteousness.

WHAT shall we say then that Abraham our father, as pertaining to the flesh, hath found? 2. For if Abraham were justified by works, he hath whereof to glory; but not before God.

Abraham founded the Church of the Old Testament,—he set up God's true worship, he received great promises for time and eternity, all believers look back to him as their pattern; yet it was no deservings of his own that obtained these privileges, God gave him the blessing not for any services performed, but because he trusted in the Divine power and mercy. Let this be our faith also. In ourselves we have nothing to rely upon, but God is infinitely good; He has guided us in our wanderings here, and promised us an everlasting home.

3. For what saith the scripture ? Abraham believed God, and it was counted unto him for righteousness.

Abraham believed that he should have a son, that his seed should inherit the land and multiply there, that a blessing to the whole world should come from his family. He lived in the future, and embraced these promises, though beyond man's sight and reason. Lord, grant us this same spirit of faith which looks to Thy revealed Word, and is sure that it will one day be fulfilled. How can the gift of righteousness be made ours unless through faith in the Divine mercy ?

4. Now to him that worketh is the reward not reckoned of grace, but of debt. 5. But to him that worketh not, but believeth on him that justifieth the ungodly, his faith is counted for righteousness.

What have we in ourselves to trust to ? Any good thing there is in us is the effect of God's grace, and is often spoilt by our own imperfections. If we thought to earn heaven by so many prayers, so many acts of mercy, so many self-denials, we should make a great mistake. Our own worthiness can never come up to the required amount, but we have the treasure of Christ's merits to draw from. He can give and can accomplish what is beyond man's power.

6. Even as David also describeth the blessedness of the man, unto whom God imputeth righteousness without works, 7. saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered. 8. Blessed is the man to whom the Lord will not impute sin.

This is my true position before God. I am not a paid servant, but a pardoned sinner. I do not boast of that blessedness which consists in spotless purity, or fervent love, or entire obedience—no, I have forfeited that ; but Scripture tells me of a blessedness which depends on God's forgiving mercy. My Saviour when on earth comforted sinners, and spoke to them of forgiveness. I take His words to myself and am at peace again, though well aware how great my sins have been.

9. Cometh this blessedness then upon the circumcision only, or upon the uncircumcision also ? for we say that faith was reckoned to Abraham for righteousness.

Is there any limit to the promise and the blessing ? No, they are as wide as the world. We too have a share in them. Faith in God's mercy through Christ is our strength and hope, as it was the stay of generations before us. Glory be to God for His plan of salvation, which avails for all ages and nations, and goes deeper than all differences of worldly condition !

10. How was it then reckoned? when he was in circumcision, or in uncircumcision? Not in circumcision, but in uncircumcision. 11. And he received the sign of circumcision, a seal of the righteousness of the faith which he had yet being uncircumcised: that he might be the father of all them that believe, though they be not circumcised; that righteousness might be imputed unto them also: 12. and the father of circumcision to them who are not of the circumcision only, but who also walk in the steps of that faith of our father Abraham, which he had being yet uncircumcised.

Abraham received circumcision, not before, but long after he had received the promise and been pronounced righteous, therefore it was a mere sign which in no way contributed to his acceptance. What we should copy in him is not the outward sign, but the inward faith. God's saints in old time differed from us in many things; they lived under a dispensation of types and figures, their world was different from our world; yet they are our patterns if we would please God. Their faith, their obedience, their prayers should be ours too. We must walk in their steps if we would arrive at the same blessed end that they found.

13. For the promise, that he should be the heir of the world, was not to Abraham, or to his seed, through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.

God promised Abraham that in his seed all nations of the earth should be blessed, and this not on condition of his keeping the Law of Moses, which was not yet given, but only out of His free mercy to him and to mankind. Salvation is sent by God, and is far beyond all our deserts. When we arrive in heaven we shall recognise at last how great God's promises are, and how truly they have been accomplished. This world is too narrow to see them clearly, but one day we shall have a fuller view. God grant that we may not miss our inheritance.

14. For if they which are of the law be heirs, faith is made void, and the promise made of none effect: 15. because the law worketh wrath: for where no law is, there is no transgression.

Under the Gospel too we must beware of a legal spirit which would rest in the performance of outward duties, and so avoid men's judgment, but without yielding up the heart. God has set us under grace, given us His Spirit, told us of His great love. What a downfall it would be for us to live merely a respectable life without great crime or disgrace! God requires more of us than that. Love, not fear, should be our ruling principle.

16. Therefore it is of faith, that it might be by grace; to

the end the promise might be sure to all the seed; not to that only which is of the law, but to that also which is of the faith of Abraham; who is the father of us all,

God's mercy is free and sure, it does not depend on our works, but on the Divine faithfulness; no faults or defects of ours shut us out from it. Let us, on our part, never let go our firm trust in God. He is the same as in old days. He still brings out His children from the heathen, reveals Himself to them, gives them blessings and promises more than they can understand. Let them only, like Abraham, give themselves up with perfect trust to do His gracious will.

17. (*As it is written, I have made thee a father of many nations,*) before him whom he believed, even God, who quickeneth the dead, and calleth those things which be not as though they were.

Before God time is nothing, nature is nothing, what seems impossible is done. He called creation into being at the first, and gave it the laws which it now has, and could as easily remove it to-morrow, if it pleased Him. My soul indeed may be dead and corrupt, wholly unable to live the life of faith, yet God's Almighty power can quicken it. When He pleases to show forth His mercy, it matters not what we think possible or impossible, there are no difficulties before Him.

18. *Who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations, according to that which was spoken, So shall thy seed be.*

If we rely on ourselves what have we to trust to? but those who rely on God have an infinite supply of strength to draw from. We are less than nothing, and whatever good thing there is in us is the gift of God's wonderful mercy; yet as we are, and taking us at our very worst, we believe firmly in God's grace, and hope for His glory. This is beyond man's sight and reason, but faith is not afraid.

19. *And being not weak in faith, he considered not his own body now dead, when he was about an hundred years old, neither yet the deadness of Sarah's womb: 20. he staggered not at the promise of God through unbelief; but was strong in faith, giving glory to God; 21. and being fully persuaded that, what he had promised, he was able also to perform.*

"God hath said," "God hath promised,"—these two thoughts are like foundations on which the soul can rest when doubt or unbelief assail her. Abraham put aside the conclusions of nature, and rested on a higher reason which told him that God's Word must

come true. What a gift faith is! how ready to overcome difficulties! how peaceful amidst contradictions! how obedient when sacrifices are required! how true, though all men fall away! Lord, grant us this great gift, that we may quietly trust Thy Word and be at peace. We know that Thou art able to bring to pass all that Thou hast promised.

22. And therefore it was imputed to him for righteousness.

God approved this faith that the holy patriarch showed; nothing he could do was so pleasing to God as his simple trust in the promises. Others look back, or look round, but Abraham looked forward only, and was sure that all God had said would come true. Why should we have a narrower notion of God than Abraham had? What He has done for us and promised to us under the Gospel is as sure as His Word was then, we are equally bound to trust it.

23. Now it was not written for his sake alone, that it was imputed to him; 24. but for us also, to whom it shall be imputed, if we believe on him that raised up Jesus our Lord from the dead;

Christ's Resurrection includes all the other Gospel mysteries, as it declares His Divine Birth, and the acceptance of His atoning Sacrifice, and the new birth of believing souls in Him. If He is not risen, then we are still in miserable darkness, having no hope, and all the saints have trusted in a lie; but since He did rise, what cannot God do for us? will He not quicken our dead souls now and our decaying bodies hereafter? What a difference it makes if we believe that Jesus has risen from the grave, never to die again! How can death hurt us now?

25. Who was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification.

On the Cross He atoned, from the Throne He sanctifies. There He destroyed sin, here He gives new life. Once for all He rescued us from Satan's power, but now continually, though unseen by us, He imparts His Spirit and prepares us to rise also. Our offences needed such a Sacrifice, and, dear friends, our sanctification needed such a Lifegiver. Nothing but the precious Blood could make atonement for us, and nothing but the Holy Spirit, which is the gift of Jesus risen and ascended, can give us inward life.

CHAPTER V.

1. Being justified by faith, we have peace with God, 2. and joy in our hope, 3. that sith we were reconciled by his blood, when we were enemies, 10. we shall much more be saved being reconciled. 12. As sin and death came by Adam, 17. so much more righteousness and life by Jesus Christ. 20. Where sin abounded, grace did super-abound.

THHEREFORE being justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ:

Why should I fear? God is my Friend. His Son has died for me, my sins have been put away. All the burden of guilt and fear of wrath is removed by the Cross. I trust not in any merits of my own, but in the love, the works, the Death of my Master, and for His sake God accounts me worthy and lets me share in His love. Should not these thoughts make me at peace within, however loudly the world rages without?

2. By whom also we have access by faith into this grace wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God.

Not only peace in the present, but joy in the future, belong to a Christian. Men set their hearts on honours of this world, but believers on something to come, something which cannot yet be fully known, but will be a fulness of joy and glory beyond words. Here are grace, and mercy, and hope; but in the next world will be something better, of which these are only foretastes. Lord, withdraw us from earthly ambition, and set our hopes upon what Thou hast prepared for them that love Thee.

3. And not only so, but we glory in tribulations also: knowing that tribulation worketh patience; 4. and patience, experience; and experience, hope: 5. and hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us.

Our peace and joy are not overthrown by suffering, for how else could we learn to be patient? and patience continues and gives us proof of God's help. He is with us, His hand holds up our fainting head. His love turns agony of body and sinking of soul into a salutary draught that can be swallowed quietly. His mercy shines on us more brightly, we see our home near, and begin to prepare for it. God's Spirit becomes a welcome Comforter, though unseen. Will not sufferers who read these verses bear testimony that they are true, and that the fruit of pain and sorrow is a great treasure of joy?

6. For when we were yet without strength, in due time Christ died for the ungodly.

Do not distrust God's love, what greater proof of it could He give? His Son came on earth to die for us, in spite of our vileness. Worthless though we are, yet still

"Who loves the Lord aright,
No soul of man can worthless find;
All will be precious in His sight,
Since Christ on all hath shined."

7. For scarcely for a righteous man will one die: yet peradventure for a good man some would even dare to die. 8. But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us.

There have been noble souls who gave up their lives to save a brother. Such sacrifices are after the pattern of that one perfect offering which Christ made to save us from death. What would any of us feel who had been saved from death at the cost of another's life? How tenderly we should cherish his memory and love his friends! Apply this to that gracious One Who shrunk from no extremity of shame and death to help us. We must be as dull as stones if we have no regard for Him. His love to us was plainly proved by act as well as word.

9. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

If our hearts fail when thinking of judgment to come, let us call to mind that our Judge will be our Saviour, the same Who was once crucified for us. Nothing can do away with His wounds once endured, His Blood once shed. The more our fear of sin deepens, the deeper should grow our trust in Him Who has delivered us and can deliver us still.

10. For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life.

The Risen Life of Christ is a subject full of joy to us. We should not lie always prostrate at the foot of the Cross, but having worshipped there, and felt our own hateful sins and the virtue of the precious Blood, we should rise and go forth to live a new life, trusting in the power of grace. Easter-time tells us of purity, of strength to fight, of hopes, and prayer, and faith ever increasing. I have been pardoned and found God's mercy, now I live a new life and feel His power.

11. And not only so, but we also joy in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom we have now received the atonement.

Our joy is not in ourselves, nor in this world's blessings, nor in any-

thing but the love of God shown to us many ways, and most of all by Christ's Death. Other joys may pass, but this one remains. The Holy Spirit tells us that we belong to God through Christ for time and for eternity, and this message gives us great joy. What can hurt us if God is so merciful, Christ's Death so prevailing, the promises so sure? We may then defy death, and age, and care to harm us.

12. Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned:

So in like manner righteousness and life came in by one Man, Christ our Saviour, and spread abroad to all His believing family, as death did to the literal descendants of Adam. We live in a fallen world where sin and death abound, yet in a redeemed world where a remedy is known that can overcome sin and death. We must not live as if mankind had never fallen, and it was safe to enjoy ourselves without thought of the morrow, nor yet forget the Divine and saving remedy.

13. (For until the law sin was in the world: but sin is not imputed when there is no law. 14. Nevertheless death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over them that had not sinned after the similitude of Adam's transgression, who is the figure of him that was to come.

Plainly this is a fallen world, men sin and die daily. Death has reigned here for many thousand years. Glory be to God for giving us a new Lord Who has set up a better kingdom, and will one day do away with the hateful reign of death! Death is indeed mighty, he claims my body for awhile and strives hard for my soul, but I know of One Who can cast him out. I have sinned, but Christ has died to save me, and therefore I do not fear death.

15. But not as the offence, so also is the free gift. For if through the offence of one many be dead, much more the grace of God, and the gift by grace, which is by one man, Jesus Christ, hath abounded unto many.

Sin and death appear in the one case, righteousness and life in the other. Sin is indeed mighty, but grace is mightier. Let us not fail to adore that infinite goodness that has provided salvation for us. Those who have known the great strength of temptation and the misery which sin brings will be the first to thank God for His saving grace which has set them free. The gift which God gave us in His dear Son is so great that He will refuse us nothing we need.

16. And not as it was by one that sinned, so is the gift: for

the judgment was by one to condemnation, but the free gift is of many offences unto justification.

One sin brought ruin and destroyed man's innocence, but innumerable sins since that time have not worn out God's forgiving mercy or hindered the saving virtue of the Cross. Adam imparted to us the sad inheritance of a fallen nature, but Jesus our Lord has adopted us, though we were in that condition, and gives us new life, and love, and strength.

17. *For if by one man's offence death reigned by one; much more they which receive abundance of grace and of the gift of righteousness shall reign in life by one, Jesus Christ.)*

Abundance supplies our poverty. Grace remits our sins. A gift is bestowed that we could never earn. Righteousness drives out sin, nay, life overcomes death, and the outcasts are raised to a kingdom. Who can rightly express the worth of God's mercy! If in this life we see so much of it, what will it not be when Christ's glory is revealed!

18. *Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life.*

One offence had infinite effect on the world for evil, but one righteous Life and holy Death had an infinite effect for good. Our natural birth made us share in the one, our new birth by grace in the other. Lord, finish the work that Thou hast wrought in us. Make us feel our need of Thy grace, lest we fall back by deadly sin into our old condition. Repair the losses that sin has already caused.

19. *For as by one man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous.*

Great is the virtue of obedience. Adam forgot God's Law and fell. Jesus our Saviour set Himself to do in all things His Father's will, and so wrought a great salvation for us. Self-will or God's will, these are the only two rules; the one leads to misery and death, the other to everlasting joy. Indeed our best obedience is imperfect, but we take refuge in Christ's finished work, and present that to God in satisfaction for our shortcomings.

20. *Moreover the law entered, that the offence might abound. But where sin abounded, grace did much more abound:*

The Law came in between the Fall and Redemption, and showed mankind their sins more gravely than nature could do. Yet this deeper sense of sin led to a deeper yearning for pardon. Men could not have welcomed a Saviour till their burdens had grown too heavy to bear.

21. That as sin hath reigned unto death, even so might grace reign through righteousness unto eternal life by Jesus Christ our Lord.

This chapter is full of comfort, and strength, and peace. Scripture indeed recognises the terrible might of sin, and the gloom of death; they have a kingdom, and reign cruelly over their slaves; but it teaches me of a Deliverer full of mercy and power Who breaks down sin and death. Evil cannot hurt His friends. He showers grace on believers now, and has something for them hereafter better than hearts can dream of.

CHAPTER VI.

1. We may not live in sin, 2. for we are dead unto it, 3. as appeareth by our baptism. 12. Let not sin reign any more, 18. because we have yielded ourselves to the service of righteousness, 23. and for that death is the wages of sin.

WHAT shall we say then? Shall we continue in sin, that grace may abound?

Human presumption abuses God's mercy. Sinners say, "God is infinitely good, He desires my salvation, He can forgive any sin however great; may I not live as I please for awhile and be sure of full forgiveness in the end?" Alas! such a reckoning goes to upset all God's gracious work; soon the heart is hardened and God withdraws His grace, and the man cares no more about conversion. May God incline us to give up sin at once, lest we never do so.

2. God forbid. How shall we, that are dead to sin, live any longer therein?

In my Baptism I renounced the devil, the world, and the flesh. The Church prayed that all carnal affections might die in me, that I might manfully fight under Christ's banner, might crucify the old man, and utterly abolish the whole body of sin. How can a life of sinful pleasure suit with such a holy calling?

3. Know ye not, that so many of us as were baptized into Jesus Christ were baptized into his death? 4. Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life.

Our Baptism was a figurative burial and resurrection. Christ our Saviour really died, was buried, and rose to life; we only go through a ceremony which recalls those saving acts of His, yet in doing

this we gain an interest in that precious Death, holy grave, and victorious Life. What is a Christian worth unless some sign of Christ's Life appear in him?

5. For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also in the likeness of his resurrection:

The new life must begin here. Indeed it is but winter-time now, and it cannot grow to perfection in this evil world; but yet there must be in us something of faith, of love, of purity, even though weak and defiled, if Christ is to recognise us one day for His members. Those who are like Him now in a new and purified life, will be like Him then in glory.

6. Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin. 7. For he that is dead is freed from sin.

Here is good news for the slaves of sin. Your cruel master is dead and you are free. Only live as free men now, lest he come to life again and seize you. Sin's service is hard. Glory be to God for rescuing us from it, and showing us true liberty! Our dear Lord and Master endured a cruel death to win us this freedom.

8. Now if we be dead with Christ, we believe that we shall also live with him: 9. knowing that Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more; death hath no more dominion over him. 10. For in that he died, he died unto sin once: but in that he liveth, he liveth unto God.

What better thing can we desire than to live with Christ? These words mean happiness, and purity, and immortality. Our Lord was subject to temptations and sorrows in this world, and, last of all, had to die in order to overcome sin; but then He entered on a new and glorified life far above all such trials. Once He overcame sin, once He fought with death, but since that time He is in the rest and glory of heaven. He calls us even while we are on earth to think of that pure and happy life of His, and find strength in it.

11. Likewise reckon ye also yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord.

We ought to answer temptation thus: "I have done with such things. I cannot join in them, because my heart and hopes are in heaven. My Friend is there, and soon I hope to join Him. If I let lust, and pride, and strife, and folly into my heart, I shall have to let go all that is most precious to me. Sin and I have bade farewell to each other."

12. Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, that ye should obey it in the lusts thereof. 13. Neither yield ye your

members as instruments of unrighteousness unto sin : but yield yourselves unto God, as those that are alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness unto God.

Our bodies are mortal, that is, they are frail, subject to death, lodging within them desires that may ruin us. But our souls are alive from the dead by faith and God's grace. Which shall we live after, the mortal body with its lusts, which will at last, if indulged, choke the life of the soul and so kill us altogether ; or the renewed soul, which has believed and felt God's love and embraced His promises ? One or the other must be our life, either of sloth and sin, or of ready, upright, cheerful obedience to God.

14. For sin shall not have dominion over you : for ye are not under the law, but under grace.

Do not fear. You have God on your side. The Law in old time taught and threatened, but it could not give believers what the Gospel does. There is in the Gospel a wealth of power and mercy opened to us, a Divine pattern, a new birth and new life, the prayers of saints and daily means of grace. If all this cannot keep us in the right way, what more could God do for our souls ?

15. What then ? shall we sin, because we are not under the law, but under grace ? God forbid.

That would indeed be turning wholesome food into poison. Christ's Blood is mighty, His promises sure, His grace ready. Should I then follow sin at pleasure, and presume that that Blood will always cleanse me, those promises always await me, that grace attend my dying-bed ? No, not for a moment ; such reasoning turns light into darkness. I will rather hate sin and fly from it, lest I bring all Christ's work to nothing as far as my soul is concerned.

16. Know ye not, that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, his servants ye are to whom ye obey ; whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness ?

We must serve one of these two masters, either sin, which binds us with a chain and drags us down deeper and deeper into utter ruin, or else holy obedience, which will make us happy here and in eternity. Lord, I have at times been a rebellious servant to Thee, and have got into the old evil bondage again. Help me that I may be again Thy faithful soldier and servant. Thy service is the best.

17. But God be thanked, that ye were the servants of sin, but ye have obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine which was delivered you. 18. Being then made free from sin, ye became the servants of righteousness.

Glory be to God for His mercy to us ! It was not by our merits, but

His grace, that we are Christians, that He has made us His children, spoken to our hearts, brought us up in His holy faith. He sends His Word through books or teachers, makes us hearken to it, helps us to obey it. Let us all our life through keep steadfast to that holy catholic faith which He has shown us, and frame our life after its teaching.

19. I speak after the manner of men because of the infirmity of your flesh: for as ye have yielded your members servants to uncleanness and to iniquity unto iniquity; even so now yield your members servants to righteousness unto holiness.

God's service is really perfect freedom, no bondage about it, and its reward is not here, but hereafter. Still, taking it as a mere service, and looking only to its consequences here, it is more worth choosing than the slavery of the world. S. Paul begs pardon for such a comparison. God is our Friend, His service all grace and love, His rewards beyond words. Still, if it were a bondage and full of tasks, His servants, after all, are happier than His enemies.

20. For when ye were the servants of sin, ye were free from righteousness.

What a sad freedom! Many boast of this. They are afraid of no sin, are free to use any evil words, commit any actions they please. They laugh at the modesty, the fear, the restraint in which God's servants live. Yet this unchecked freedom will one day become an absolute bondage to those who use it. They will long earnestly for the way of righteousness, and yet have no power to walk in it. Lord, keep us free from sin, and safe under Thy yoke.

21. What fruit had ye then in those things whereof ye are now ashamed? for the end of those things is death.

When the pleasure of sin is over, what fruit does it leave? Only dust and ashes, shame at what is past, rage with oneself, and a sad misgiving as to the future. Lord, mortify our senses, keep us from this deadly pleasure, let us earnestly repent our past falls. What infinite folly it is to choose what will make us wretched, instead of keeping on our resistance for a little while, and then being at peace and pure for ever!

22. But now being made free from sin, and become servants to God, ye have your fruit unto holiness, and the end everlasting life.

O Jesus, good Master, Whose servant I am, let me wait on Thee with diligence, attend Thee reverently, fulfil Thy bidding heartily, and so find blessings here and hereafter. I rejoice to be Thy servant, and do not want to go back to the hard bondage of sin. Thou hast made me free and wilt keep me so.

23. For the wages of sin is death; but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Sin pays his servants. They get the fruit of their doings—a little pleasure for awhile, and then sorrow without end. God more than pays His, for He recompenses over-abundantly any sacrifice they make. He gives them what no efforts of their own could earn. Ask them if He has cheated them, ask them whether they have not found in God, love, blessings, and hopes too great for words. They will tell you they have a kind and liberal Master, nay, a most merciful and dear Friend, here and for ever.

CHAPTER VII.

1. No law hath power over a man longer than he liveth. 4. But we are dead to the law. 7. Yet is not the law sin, 12. but holy, just, good, 16. as I acknowledge, who am grieved because I cannot keep it.

KNOW ye not, brethren, (for I speak to them that know the law,) how that the law hath dominion over a man as long as he liveth ? 2. For the woman which hath an husband is bound by the law to her husband so long as he liveth ; but if the husband be dead, she is loosed from the law of her husband. 3. So then if, while her husband liveth, she be married to another man, she shall be called an adulteress : but if her husband be dead, she is free from that law ; so that she is no adulteress, though she be married to another man.

Death comes in and breaks the marriage tie. It is indeed holy and binding, and not to be dissolved by man ; but when death comes, it loses its force, and the survivor is free to seek another union. When husband and wife remember that death will soon part them, they will be patient with each other, will fear to weaken that union by selfishness or strife, will cherish the hope of meeting again in a better world. Alas, how frail is our happiness here ! the dearest ties and happiest homes cannot last long ; all things here break, and change, and pass away.

4. Wherefore, my brethren, ye also are become dead to the law by the body of Christ ; that ye should be married to another, even to him who is raised from the dead, that we should bring forth fruit unto God.

Death has come in between Christians and the Jewish Law, and broken off their obligation to it. This is not a real death in them, but a spiritual one, and only a figure of Christ's Death, which was

real, and which they share in. Have we known anything of this death? Is the risen Jesus our Spouse and King, with Whom we share our inmost thoughts, for Whom we live, by Whom we do good works? Such questions teach us how far we fall short of our heavenly calling.

5. For when we were in the flesh, the motions of sins, which were by the law, did work in our members to bring forth fruit unto death.

This is a life without Christ, enslaved by sin, working only fruits of selfishness and misery. God in His mercy keep us from falling back into it. Sin is strong, my good resolutions feeble, the new life in me only beginning. Lord, by Thy mighty grace give me power to put down sin and live to Thee.

6. But now we are delivered from the law, that being dead wherein we were held; that we should serve in newness of spirit, and not in the oldness of the letter.

This is Divine grace, which frees believers from the Law, and sin, and death, and gives them a new heart, and power to serve God, and a sure hope of everlasting life. Many souls have felt this change which has brought them from death to life. They serve God now with rejoicing hearts, and find daily more and more delight in doing so.

7. What shall we say then? Is the law sin? God forbid. Nay, I had not known sin, but by the law: for I had not known lust, except the law had said, Thou shalt not covet. 8. But sin, taking occasion by the commandment, wrought in me all manner of concupiscence. For without the law sin was dead. 9. For I was alive without the law once: but when the commandment came, sin revived, and I died. 10. And the commandment, which was ordained to life, I found to be unto death.

It is not enough to know God's Law. Many persons fall into sin more deeply the more they know of right and wrong. All their opportunities of light only increase their condemnation. Lord, when I see my own great weakness, and the strength of sin, and the strictness of Thy holy Law, I fear for myself. Nothing can keep me from ruin but to lay hold on Thy outstretched hand. I dare not trust to my own knowledge, or experience, or character, all these are too weak to protect me in the hour of temptation.

11. For sin, taking occasion by the commandment, deceived me, and by it slew me.

Many strong men have been slain by sin. When my turn comes to

fight the giant or baffle the serpent, where can I find strength to resist? Mighty men have proved too weak, and wise men too simple. Nay, I put my whole trust in the Lord Jesus, Who Himself overcame sin and enables His friends to overcome it also. The more I feel my own helplessness, the more readily I turn to my Deliverer, Who can keep me from a mortal blow, and raise me if I have fallen.

12. *Wherefore the law is holy, and the commandment holy, and just, and good.* **13.** *Was then that which is good made death unto me? God forbid. But sin, that it might appear sin, working death in me by that which is good; that sin by the commandment might become exceeding sinful.*

How weak a thing knowledge is! I know what is right to do, something about God, and my duty, and right behaviour, and the consequences of evil; yet all this proves too weak to restrain me, and only condemns me the more. Glory be to God for putting His holy Law into a living pattern! Jesus is holy, and just, and good, though a Man Who was once subject to temptation and death. His love can turn my belief into practice.

14. *For we know that the law is spiritual: but I am carnal, sold under sin.*

It is easy to begin sinful ways, but hard to give them up. How many there are who groan daily under this heavy bondage! They would give countless treasures to get free from sin. They find him a hard master. Let us who have been set free by God's mercy beware lest our old tyrant catch us again. We still bear about with us a body subject to temptation, a mind not altogether trained to obey God's Law. Remember that sin once owned us and longs to regain his slave.

15. *For that which I do I allow not: for what I would, that do I not; but what I hate, that do I.* **16.** *If then I do that which I would not, I consent unto the law that it is good.* **17.** *Now then it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.*

Here the apostle describes the sinner's state. He knows how good a thing is righteousness, but he has a strong, overmastering power within which will not let him follow it. He can perhaps talk well about being good, can even join in worship, and teach others their duty, but he himself falls to the ground before temptation. O Lord, if this is true of a sinner's state, keep me from the first beginnings of evil. Let me manfully fight against sin, the world, and the devil all my days.

18. *For I know that in me (that is, in my flesh,) dwelleth*

no good thing : for to will is present with me ; but how to perform that which is good I find not. 19. For the good that I would I do not : but the evil which I would not, that I do. 20. Now if I do that I would not, it is no more I that do it, but sin that dwelleth in me.

Indeed it is something to see what is good, and to desire it,—nay, with clear judgment and approval, to choose it as our rule. Thank God for taking us so far on the way. Only then our own desperate weakness comes in and drags us back from the right way. Lord, why am I thus divided against myself? I see the folly of being vain, and covetous, and unclean, and angry. I am sure Thy side is the one to win. My whole mind agrees with Thy Law, but, alas! I am not free to follow it.

21. I find then a law, that, when I would do good, evil is present with me.

Open your eyes and see your enemy; he is close at hand, he would fain ruin you. Arm yourself with prayers, and God's Word, and His ordinances. Consider your own nothingness and God's victorious grace, and in reliance on Him fight bravely. Indeed you love what is good, but do not forget your danger. When we come to heaven only good will remain, evil will be gone for ever.

22. For I delight in the law of God after the inward man : 23. but I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members.

Let me increase this delight in God's Law by reading the Bible. Let me get free from sin's law, and keep my freedom by self-denial and a careful walk. Let me remember that my dear Lord's service is true peace, though it seems hard at the first start, and the world's service is only a shameful slavery where men are deceived at first and afterwards treated as brutes and outcasts.

24. O wretched man that I am ! who shall deliver me from the body of this death ?

From how many souls has this cry gone up to God! It is not literal riddance of this body that they longed for, but freedom from the strong temptations and frailties of the body, which hindered them from serving God. They loved holiness, and yet could not reach it. Lord, let this cry be mine, and do Thou answer it by enabling me to overcome evil.

25. I thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord. So then with the mind I myself serve the law of God ; but with the flesh the law of sin.

We are at peace, even while at war. Mercy has looked down from heaven and given us help and courage. Still the world roars, the devil and the flesh beguile or threaten, but the Christian knows of a strength greater than his own, a holiness that is all love, a Sacrifice that can atone for all sins. He knows that frail men have been sanctified by Divine grace even amidst temptation. He feels the tug of war, but fights on bravely till night brings the victory.

CHAPTER VIII.

1. They that are in Christ, and live according to the Spirit, are free from condemnation. 5, 13. What harm cometh of the flesh, 6, 14. and what good of the Spirit: 17. and what of being God's child, 19. whose glorious deliverance all things long for, 29. was beforehand decreed from God. 38. What can sever us from his love?

THREE is therefore now no condemnation to them which are in Christ Jesus, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

If I am in Christ by faith and love towards Him, I cannot be condemned. His merits are mine; I share in His purity; my unworthiness is covered by His righteousness. All the terrible conflict ends in peace, the heavy burden is removed. Lord, what good news is here! let me make it my own, and thank Thee for it daily.

2. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus hath made me free from the law of sin and death.

I was a slave groaning under the dominion of a cruel tyrant who threatened me with utter ruin, but now my chains are broken by Christ, now I have no fear, now I have no tyrant over me, but serve God gladly and willingly. Sin's service is slavery, Christ's service is freedom and peace.

3. For what the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh, God sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and for sin, condemned sin in the flesh: 4. that the righteousness of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not after the flesh, but after the Spirit.

My Lord and Saviour condemned sin. It had no part in Him while He lived, though He shared in my temptations and infirmities, and His precious Death and glorious Rising again supply me with power to follow such an example. Good advice, and worldly wisdom, and men's applause are feeble helps; but the life and work of Jesus daily thought over is a strong support, it enables frail mankind to rise above nature.

5. *For they that are after the flesh do mind the things of the flesh ; but they that are after the Spirit the things of the Spirit.*
 6. *For to be carnally minded is death ; but to be spiritually minded is life and peace.*

What do I live for ? Is it for the petty vanity and pleasures, the fading delights, the dross and ashes of this transitory world, or is it for God's love and the pursuit of holiness ? The one frame of mind will bring me disappointment soon and utter misery in the end. The other will be always happiness, ripening at last into heavenly joy. The flesh is pleasant for awhile, but soon loses its savour. The Spirit never deceives those who follow it.

7. *Because the carnal mind is enmity against God : for it is not subject to the law of God, neither indeed can be.* 8. *So then they that are in the flesh cannot please God.*

Some people try to follow both the Spirit and the flesh. They profess religion and speak of it, but are covetous, idle, self-indulgent, take no pains to overcome self. How can God be pleased with such a character ? He did not mean us to be Christians after this sort, but to make a brave effort to live after His Word, and put aside the flesh with its evil passions. Those who are always pleasing themselves in little things soon learn to please sin and Satan and displease God.

9. *But ye are not in the flesh, but in the Spirit, if so be that the Spirit of God dwell in you. Now if any man have not the Spirit of Christ, he is none of his.*

It is not enough to have been baptized, and have the name of a Christian. I must also have the Holy Spirit in my heart, if Christ is to recognise me for His own. How can I live without the guidance of that Blessed Spirit ? What care I must take not to grieve Him or drive Him away by sin ! If He leaves me, I am but darkness.

10. *And if Christ be in you, the body is dead because of sin ; but the Spirit is life because of righteousness.*

The Christian is compounded of a dying body and risen soul. His body is frail and decaying, and soon turns to dust, but his soul is new born with Christ, and lives in the hope of a heavenly inheritance. Let us rejoice with trembling in our new condition. If the regenerate spirit does not at last quicken the mortal body, it will be because the body has tainted the spirit with its own death, and quenched the spark of life that God had given to it.

11. *But if the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead dwell in you, he that raised up Christ from the dead*

shall also quicken your mortal bodies by his Spirit that dwelleth in you.

It seems almost beyond belief that the lifeless body should rise again ; but remember that Jesus rose, and His risen Body could be touched and handled, though not liable to pain or death any more. Also observe the wonderful change that the Holy Spirit works in conversion ; that is like a rising from the dead. Nothing is impossible to God's power and love. He will raise us up, each in our own person, able to serve and love Him in that new life better than we can do here.

12. *Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh.* 13. *For if ye live after the flesh, ye shall die : but if ye through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, ye shall live.*

We owe the flesh something, our bodies need food, and clothing, and care, but we owe God infinitely more. He has made and redeemed us, and put His Holy Spirit in our hearts. We must not satisfy the body at the cost of the soul. A Christian must keep under his body if he would live the life of grace and glory.

14. *For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God.*

Sons of God must have a certain likeness to their heavenly Father. They must rule their actions by His Word, seek for the guidance of His Spirit in prayer, follow the example of His dear Son Jesus Christ. Such, and such only, are recognised by God for His children. We too are called by Divine grace to this condition, let us daily seek strength to walk in it and to amend our shortcomings.

15. *For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear ; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father.*

We should come before God with such prayers as this. He is not a mere Master Who can reward and punish, but a loving Father on Whose goodness we rely, to Whom we open our hearts, whether in joy or sorrow. Our Saviour in His darkest hour of trouble used these same words. Prayer is the earnest cry of a troubled and anxious and yet believing heart.

16. *The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God :*

Where is this witness ? It is a sense of God's goodness, it is comfort in reading His Word, power to do right, peace even amidst trials, joy in His great mercy to us. Believers know what it is. If we obey God the witness will speak more and more clearly.

17. And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together.

God's children enjoy many blessings now, but they look forward to the world to come for the full entrance on God's promises. Christ our Lord won by His sufferings immortal life, and this He bestows on all those who follow Him. If our sufferings have been borne with Him, by remembrance of what He suffered, and in a patient spirit like His, then we shall have other experiences to pass through, also with Him, but of joy, not grief.

18. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us.

The apostle was a good reckoner. What proportion is there between the trials of this life, however great they may be, and God's promises of what is to come? One day we shall look back on our time here and marvel that it was so soon over. It is but a short, rough voyage, and then comes our home which we shall never lose.

19. For the earnest expectation of the creature waiteth for the manifestation of the sons of God.

Nature desires perfection, yet fails to find it. God has set in our hearts an unsatisfied yearning for happiness, for peace, for goodness. How shall we lay hold of these blessings? Nothing in this world can give us what we want, we must look beyond. We seek earnestly to find God's sons here, but they are concealed beneath a covering of mortal infirmity. One day they will be manifested.

20. For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, 21. because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.

Vanity of vanities, such is the wise man's judgment upon life. We are in bondage to decay and death. We long for happiness, and yet miss it. Who will give us what we long for? Be patient, and remember that all this burden is meant to make us seek our true home. We are travellers, exiles, slaves as yet, but one day perfect peace and true freedom will be ours.

22. For we know that the whole creation groaneth and travaileth in pain together until now. 23. And not only they, but ourselves also, which have the firstfruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.

Here we see only the travail-pains, the new life is yet to come. Here are sighs and tears, but they will be followed by great joy. God made us all for good; even our frail bodies are to be made glorious and immortal. When we find sufferers bowed down by pain or by perplexity of mind, we must lead their thoughts to that day which will do away with all darkness.

24. For we are saved by hope: but hope that is seen is not hope: for what a man seeth, why doth he yet hope for?

What a treasure hope is to the Christian! It makes heaven present to him, sweetens the ills and overcomes the pleasures of this life, enables him to persevere bravely. Hope that is fixed on earthly joys ends in disappointment, they are not so delightful in reality as they seemed at a distance. But God's promises will satisfy all our wants.

25. But if we hope for that we see not, then do we with patience wait for it.

The Christian life is passed in a spirit of patience. We must be patient with God, Who delays for awhile to fulfil His Word; with our brethren, who grieve or misunderstand us; with our own hearts, which are slow to do God's bidding; with the troubles and sorrows that surround our path. All our life through we are waiting patiently for something not yet fulfilled. Unbelievers mock at us, but we are content to wait.

26. Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what we should pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered.

True prayer is then a groaning or earnest desire which cannot be fully put into words. Such longings come of God's Spirit, Who plants in us a deep feeling of our poverty and wretchedness and of the wealth of Divine mercy. What to pray for rightly I know not, but I entreat God's help, I lean wholly on Him, I grieve over my own and my brethren's sin and sorrow, I present myself humbly before the throne of grace.

27. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God.

God may not grant the actual request that is made in prayer, but He answers the spirit of it, if it is agreeable to His holy will. Often I am mistaken in asking this or that; it would do harm if God gave it me. But I cannot be mistaken in asking the spreading of His kingdom, the perfecting of saints, the conversion of sinners, the drawing near of His glory. All these desires come of the Holy

Spirit, and He Who gives the prayer will also answer it. Let my prayers every day be such as God's searching eye can approve, and be made in submission to His holy will.

28. And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose.

God's calling and purpose remain sure, no adversities can hinder Him from bringing His children home. He knows all things that can happen to me, and has determined by means of them to work out His gracious plan for my salvation, which began in eternity. Lord, if I love Thee, if I have felt Thy call, then I am sure Thou wilt never give me up.

29. For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the first-born among many brethren. 30. Moreover whom he did pre-destinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified.

God has called me by His grace, and justified me by the application of Christ's merits. These happen in time, and are the second and third steps in His Divine plan. I may therefore humbly trust that I have a share in the first and fourth also, that is, in predestination and in glory. I cannot fathom the great depth of His judgments, but I have entire confidence in His mercy. Let me imitate His dear Son, Who is our Pattern, and thus become more and more fit to share His kingdom.

31. What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?

This faith is a strong shield which nothing can pierce through. What matter it to me that all the powers of wickedness are ranged against me, that floods of trouble beat upon me, that I have to suffer and die? God is my Friend, and He can in a moment bring me into perfect peace.

32. He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things?

What more precious gift could God give as a proof of His love? If I am tempted to doubt whether God takes an interest in my cares and trials, let me call to mind the Incarnation of His Son. He gave up His Divine glory, and endured the Cross and Death, in order that we might each of us feel God's love, and know our sins are forgiven, and our salvation assured.

33. Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? It is God that justifieth.

Men may call us evil names, but yet God pronounces us innocent.
If God has chosen and forgiven us, the world may say what it will.
We look to His judgment to make our uprightness clear.

34. Who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us.

Our own faint hearts may raise doubts or misgivings, but yet Christ's work stands sure. He died. He rose again. He ascended into heaven. He is there still pleading His sacrifice for us. Let us rejoice in these great mysteries, and place all our confidence in our Saviour, not in anything of our own. The Church at her altars here below joins in Christ's mighty intercession, and does on earth what He is doing in heaven.

35. Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? shall tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword?

No, these bitter things bring us nearer to Him. It is comfort, and peace, and wealth that raise up barriers between us and our Lord. Christians in those times had to bear the reality of these words. They were often imprisoned, beaten, starved, put to death, yet a sense of their Saviour's love carried them through all. They knew that nothing could undo His gracious work for their salvation.

36. As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter.

How much we owe to the holy saints and martyrs! They by their blood won for us freedom to serve God. If we have fallen upon quieter times, let us be thankful. But yet if we have no enemies, and no difficulties, may it not be because we are more lukewarm than they? Christ's sheep must never make friends with the wolf, who seeks to devour souls.

37. Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.

"What is this heavenly might
Making our darkness light?"

What is it that makes the weak strong, turns decay and pain into joy, triumphs over the great burdens, the sorrow, the separation, the temptations of this sad world? Only Christ's love, nothing else can do it. He Who suffered and overcame gives the same strength to His weak and suffering friends. They feel He is with them, and so are at rest.

38. For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor

things to come, 39. nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

What is this mighty host? Death comes forward with its terrors, life with its temptations, heavenly beings shine forth in glorious or terrible show, present troubles touch me, fears for what is to come vex me, successes one while, sufferings another while, exalt or depress me. Yet I remain firm upon the Rock, knowing in Whom I have believed. The changes and chances of this mortal life cannot upset that gracious work of God which He has accomplished once for all. I lay hold of that by a humble faith and am safe. If I can by God's grace drive away deadly sin, I need fear no other enemy.

CHAPTER IX.

1. Paul is sorry for the Jews. 7. All the seed of Abraham were not the children of the promise. 18. God hath mercy upon whom he will. 21. The potter may do with his clay what he list. 25. The calling of the Gentiles and rejecting of the Jews were foretold. 32. The cause why so few Jews embraced the righteousness of faith.

I SAY the truth in Christ, I lie not, my conscience also bearing me witness in the Holy Ghost, 2. that I have great heaviness and continual sorrow in my heart.

Who grieve as they ought over the loss of souls? Is it a light matter that so many forget God, despise His promised salvation, turn all their privileges into ruin? When Paul thought of this it grieved him to the heart. Let me feel as I ought how terrible is the condition of souls left without God, that I may plead with sinners, and guard myself from falling into the pit.

3. *For I could wish that myself were accursed from Christ for my brethren, my kinsmen according to the flesh:*

He wishes to take the place of his brethren and lose heaven, if only they might gain it. Indeed he delighted in Christ's love, and knew that nothing could separate him from His Saviour; but yet he felt that he could give up all, if only more souls could be saved. He was not content with giving up this world's advantages, but would have parted with those of heaven also. This self-sacrificing love rebukes my selfishness, which is so little disposed to part with any comfort.

4. *Who are Israelites; to whom pertaineth the adoption, and the glory, and the covenants, and the giving of the law, and the service of God, and the promises;*

What a list of privileges, and yet under the Gospel we have greater ones! We are children of God in a higher sense than the Jews were, His glorious presence is more securely pledged to us. The New Testament contains better covenants and promises than the Old Testament had. The Church's worship is more spiritual and her hopes higher. If a member of Christ, a child of God, an inheritor of heaven, throws away his opportunities, he loses more than the Jews could lose.

5. Whose are the fathers, and of whom as concerning the flesh Christ came, who is over all, God blessed for ever. Amen.

This was their highest honour, to have given birth to Christ. As concerning the flesh He was a Jew, born of Mary, and subject to the conditions of our nature, though without sin. But in His true being He was God's Son and our Lord, as well as our Brother. I adore this great mystery, and place all my trust in it, but acknowledge that it is beyond my power to comprehend.

6. Not as though the word of God hath taken none effect. For they are not all Israel, which are of Israel: 7. neither, because they are the seed of Abraham, are they all children: but, In Isaac shall thy seed be called.

God's promises have not failed, though so many Jews reject the Gospel. True Israelites, true children of Abraham, had the same faith as their ancestor. They looked out for God's message, believed it, and so obtained the blessing. It is agreeable to God's dealings to limit His gifts to those who believe. Those are not all true members of Christ who fill our Churches, nor true partakers of the Bread of Life who come to the altar. God sees who belong to Him, and reserves His blessing for them.

8. That is, They which are the children of the flesh, these are not the children of God: but the children of the promise are counted for the seed. 9. For this is the word of promise, At this time will I come, and Sarah shall have a son.

I am a child of God by grace, not nature. It was His Divine love that chose me, His power that called me, His grace that keeps me in this heavenly calling. I have to thank Him first of all for the privileges that I enjoy, and I trust in His promises now and for the world to come. I depend not on any merits or attainments of my own, but only on His abundant mercy.

10. And not only this; but when Rebecca also had conceived by one, even by our father Isaac; 11. (for the children being not yet born, neither having done any good or evil, that the purpose of God according to election might stand, not of works,

but of him that calleth;) 12. it was said unto her, The elder shall serve the younger. 13. As it is written, Jacob have I loved, but Esau have I hated.

Out of Isaac's sons God chose one to be the founder of His covenant people, and refused the other. Just so He leaves some to be Jews or heathens, and calls on others to be Christians. Just so, too, out of one family He permits some of the children to grow up unbelieving or ungodly, while He converts and sanctifies the rest. O my God, I cannot fathom the depths of Thy Providence. Why things are thus, I know not, all I know is that I am most unworthy, and yet Thy love has spoken to my heart and bade me believe. I have no works of my own that can stand Thy judgment, yet I hope even while I fear.

14. What shall we say then? Is there unrighteousness with God? God forbid. 15. For he saith to Moses, I will have mercy on whom I will have mercy, and I will have compassion on whom I will have compassion.

God's taking the Gentiles and rejecting the Jews shows us the freeness of His mercy. He can continue it to whom He pleases; men do not earn it by their own privileges or works. He has refused it to the proud, and promised it to the humble and contrite heart. Mercy and compassion are the special marks of the Gospel. Let us embrace them readily, and observe them as shown forth in Christ's life. He was full of compassion.

16. So then it is not of him that willeth, nor of him that runneth, but of God that sheweth mercy.

Pride would reckon all to itself, but humility delights to ascribe all to God and feel her own nothingness. What have I to build upon? My will is weak, my efforts feeble, my knowledge small, but I know that there is close at hand a great depth of Divine power and love pledged to my salvation. My strength lies in knowing that I am nothing, but God is all.

17. For the scripture saith unto Pharaoh, Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up, that I might shew my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth. 18. Therefore hath he mercy on whom he will have mercy, and whom he will he hardeneth.

God's judgments on a sinner are meant to make us reflect, and to humble us under His mighty hand. Such a one has received chastisement and mercies, and yet is only more God's enemy than before. Should we not tremble, and yet rejoice that God has dealt otherwise with us? All the great events, the glories, the crimes, the follies of this world are overruled by God to His glory and the

good of His chosen. His mercy finds everywhere hearts to soften, His justice sins to punish.

19. Thou wilt say then unto me, Why doth he yet find fault ? For who hath resisted his will ?

This is a doubter's question. If God is Almighty, All-wise, All-good, then His purpose must stand sure; how then can frail man oppose Him, and bring His plan to nought? Sometimes our hearts are confounded; we question God's wisdom or man's responsibility, we lose ourselves in great depths. What can we do but hold fast to plain duty, and to the Cross of Jesus? In these two alone is guidance.

20. Nay but, O man, who art thou that repliest against God ? Shall the thing formed say to him that formed it, Why hast thou made me thus ? 21. Hath not the potter power over the clay, of the same lump to make one vessel unto honour, and another unto dishonour ?

Great reverence befits us when we examine the dealings of our Maker. He is God, and we are frail and feeble men. We may not hope to understand His whole plan, or to know why He deals in mercy with one, in wrath with another; yet we know that He has chosen us in Christ, and new-made us by His grace. We who believe have to tell of His abundant mercies to us.

22. What if God, willing to shew his wrath, and to make his power known, endured with much longsuffering the vessels of wrath fitted to destruction : 23. and that he might make known the riches of his glory on the vessels of mercy, which he had afore prepared unto glory,

God's long-suffering runs through all His works. He is patient with the impenitent, giving them many calls and warnings, and still more patient with converted sinners, bearing with their defects and gently leading them on towards heaven. Lord, give me grace to profit by Thy mercy; let me be not a vessel of wrath ending only in shame and ruin, but a vessel of mercy prepared by Thee to inherit glory.

24. Even us, whom he hath called, not of the Jews only, but also of the Gentiles ?

God's holy Catholic Church contains believers of all nations and conditions. Jews and Gentiles, learned and simple, rich and poor, are equally welcomed there. All alike look to God's goodness as the only ground of their hope. He has called us, and therefore we will not fear.

25. As he saith also in Osee, I will call them my people, which were not my people ; and her beloved, which was not

beloved: 26. And it shall come to pass, that in the place where it was said unto them, Ye are not my people; there shall they be called the children of the living God.

We are God's people, guided by His hand. He loves us, and bids us love Him in turn. We are His children, and expect an inheritance from Him. How great are these mercies, and how undeserved by us! When we look back on past days and remember how we once lived, we marvel to see what grace has done.

27. Esaias also crieth concerning Israel, Though the number of the children of Israel be as the sand of the sea, a remnant shall be saved: 28. for he will finish the work, and cut it short in righteousness: because a short work will the Lord make upon the earth.

God's true servants may be but a remnant amidst so many careless ones, yet He is their God and will not forsake them. Soon He will bring to an end their days of trial, and cut short the world's wickedness. Eternity is coming; how short will the world's history seem then to look back upon!

29. And as Esaias said before, Except the Lord of Sabaoth had left us a seed, we had been as Sodoma, and been made like unto Gomorrah.

Sodom and Gomorrah are examples of God's awful judgments. Yet we need not fear, even if our sins have been as grievous as theirs were, for we are still living in a time of mercy. The angels warn us, the fire and brimstone hold back from us, God points out a safe refuge to which we may fly; only let us beware lest we neglect these warnings.

30. What shall we say then? That the Gentiles, which followed not after righteousness, have attained to righteousness, even the righteousness which is of faith.

Many believers can feel thus: Once I thought not of religion, I lived without God, and found my pleasure in sin, but now His mercy has sought me out. I believe and hope, I seek that righteousness which His grace alone can give me. I have found what I never dreamt of seeking, or rather God has found me when I was lost. Glory be to Him for His saving mercy!

31. But Israel, which followed after the law of righteousness, hath not attained to the law of righteousness.

How strange! God's own people whom He had set apart to keep His true worship alive in the world, and observe His holy law, missed the true end of it all. They professed religion, read the Scriptures, offered sacrifices, and yet when Christ came to make the

Law perfect, they refused Him. All their great privileges seemed to be of no profit. Lord, let not my greater opportunities be thrown away as theirs were.

32. Wherefore? Because they sought it not by faith, but as it were by the works of the law. For they stumbled at that stumblingstone; 33. as it is written, Behold, I lay in Sion a stumblingstone and rock of offence: and whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

The Gospel required men to be humble, to deny themselves, to regard all men as brethren. It put forward Christ's Death as the means of our life. These lessons were too hard for the Jews to learn, yet those who did learn them found salvation. No Christian ought to be utterly confounded by the mystery of God's decrees or the strength of evil; let us only believe in Jesus Christ and trust Him. He will not forsake us. Those who believe can pass with a quiet spirit through life and death, for they know how great is their Saviour's power to help them.

CHAPTER X.

5. The scripture sheweth the difference betwixt the righteousness of the law, and this of faith, xi. and that all, both Jew and Gentile, that believe, shall not be confounded, xii. and that the Gentiles shall receive the word and believe. xiii. Israel was not ignorant of these things.

BRETHREN, my heart's desire and prayer to God for Israel is, that they might be saved.

No ill-treatment which Paul had received, no suspicion which his countrymen felt for him, could destroy his desire to see their conversion. He forgot all injuries, and only longed that they should be one in faith and hope with himself. Such should be our feeling towards those who have been our enemies. Oh that all differences could be swallowed up in Christ's love!

2. For I bear them record that they have a zeal of God, but not according to knowledge.

How common this same zeal without knowledge is among Christians, and how much harm it does! Let us seek knowledge by reading God's Word and listening to good men's advice, lest we be among those who do harm, meaning to do good. Let prayer, and a humble mind, and much patience accompany our zeal, so that it may be accepted.

3. For they being ignorant of God's righteousness, and going

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about to establish their own righteousness, have not submitted themselves unto the righteousness of God.

Many Christians are like Jews ; they do not love God, or feel their unworthiness, or long to be better, but go through certain outward forms, and are quite content. They have the name of being respectable and devout, but what true signs of God's Spirit do they show? Lord, teach us what Thy righteousness is, and make us seek it with earnest prayer. Thou alone canst show it to us and bestow it on us ; of ourselves we are but vile earth and miserable sinners.

4. For Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to every one that believeth.

Faith in One Who is holy can alone make us holy. God did not mean believers to be made holy by heaping one ordinance on another, but to consider His righteous Law, and their own weakness, and so embrace with all affection that Divine Friend Who appeared on earth to show us what holiness and mercy are like. All true yearnings of heart under the old covenant were met by the words and acts of our Saviour.

5. For Moses describeth the righteousness which is of the law, That the man which doeth those things shall live by them.

Law says, "Do this and you will be rewarded, do that and you will be punished." God promised Canaan and a happy life there to those who did right, and threatened great judgments on those who disobeyed ; but our hearts need help from above to follow the command and avoid the judgment. Of ourselves we cannot keep God's righteous Law.

6. But the righteousness which is of faith speaketh on this wise, Say not in thine heart, Who shall ascend into heaven ? (that is, to bring Christ down from above:) 7. or, Who shall descend into the deep ? (that is, to bring up Christ again from the dead.)

Thank God for this. Christ has accomplished His saving work for us once for all. He has come down from heaven for us men and for our salvation. He has died on the Cross for sin, and risen victoriously from the grave. No need to doubt of God's mercy, or His grace, or eternal life. Man could not have thought of such a mighty salvation as this, but God has planned and performed it.

8. But what saith it ? The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart : that is, the word of faith, which we preach ; 9. That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved.

Confess Christ by a true obedience, never being ashamed of your Lord Who died for you ; believe on Him with a living faith that prays and reads of His mighty acts, and longs to know more of Him day by day. Thus you will find peace here and everlasting joy hereafter. Here is the Gospel put simply for simple souls, and yet full of living power.

10. For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness ; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.

Lord, I thank Thee for the faith which Thou hast given me. Give me grace to profess it all my life long. Let me find righteousness in it here, and eternal salvation in the world to come. I must not be ashamed of such a Master. If God's Son died for me, I am bound to live for Him.

11. For the scripture saith, Whosoever believeth on him shall not be ashamed.

Trust in God, and all will go well. Whom did He ever deceive that looked to Him for salvation ? Human friends may betray or forsake us, but God revealed in Christ is a sure Helper. Let us look to Him more closely, and we shall pass with a quiet spirit through all this world's trials.

12. For there is no difference between the Jew and the Greek : for the same Lord over all is rich unto all that call upon him.

13. For whosoever shall call upon the name of the Lord shall be saved.

Lord, teach us to pray, that is the secret of grace and strength, that is the key which unlocks God's treasure-house. All religious duties are summed up in prayer, because it is their life. Call upon God earnestly, frequently, trustfully, and you will find an abundant answer.

14. How then shall they call on him in whom they have not believed ? and how shall they believe in him of whom they have not heard ? and how shall they hear without a preacher ? 15. and how shall they preach, except they be sent ? as it is written, How beautiful are the feet of them that preach the gospel of peace, and bring glad tidings of good things !

God sends preachers that men may believe, and belief is necessary that they may pray. God, Who would have men worship Him in spirit and in truth, has also planned the means necessary to bring them to the attitude of prayer. How many households there are in a Christian land where God is never called upon, no prayers go up from thence ! Lord, send to these dark places some messengers of Thine who may tell the good tidings of Thy love. What a happy change it would be to see faith and prayer abiding there !

16. *But they have not all obeyed the gospel. For Esaias saith, Lord, who hath believed our report?* 17. *So then faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God.*

Do not be surprised at men's unbelief; has it not always been so? God speaks in many ways, and most plainly of all through His dear Son; but there are many who neither listen nor believe. Lord, give us seeing eyes and hearing ears that we may receive Thy Word and profit by it.

18. *But I say, Have they not heard? Yes verily, their sound went into all the earth, and their words unto the ends of the world.*

God's voice is heard. He speaks in nature: how wonderful all His works are! I learn there how great and wise He is. He speaks in Providence: I feel His gracious dealings with me all my life through. He speaks by the Cross: there I see clearly His holiness and compassion. Whatever others may say, I at least have heard His call, and must answer for it if I do not obey.

19. *But I say, Did not Israel know? First Moses saith, I will provoke you to jealousy by them that are no people, and by a foolish nation I will anger you.*

Even Moses spoke of the Jews' unbelief, and that others would take their privileges. How many Christians there are who throw away all their opportunities, while the ignorant and poor embrace God's Word! Their dull and narrow understandings profit by what their betters throw away. Their faith puts to shame the unbelief of the wise; their love and zeal, the coldness of those who have been well taught.

20. *But Esaias is very bold, and saith, I was found of them that sought me not; I was made manifest unto them that asked not after me.*

God's judgments are unsearchable. He removes graces from some and bestows them on others. He sought us out in our blindness and opened our eyes to see His truth. Let us not provoke Him to take away the light which we now enjoy. When we have found Him we have found an infinite treasure, when He becomes manifest to us we enjoy great light; all this comes not of any deserts of our own, but of His abundant mercy.

21. *But to Israel he saith, All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people.*

Christ crucified stretches out His hands to us, inviting us to hear, pouring mercies on us, showing us the right way. Shall we remain indifferent to that gracious invitation? Lord, if my past days have

been thus, if I have been disobedient, if I have despised Thy will, if I have chosen my own ways to walk in, let me now choose Thy side. Those are happy who listen, consider, and obey, not those who scoff at and disobey Thy message.

CHAPTER XI.

1. God hath not cast off all Israel. 7. Some were elected, though the rest were hardened. 16. There is hope of their conversion. 18. The Gentiles may not insult upon them: 26. for there is a promise of their salvation. 33. God's judgments are unsearchable.

I SAY then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid. For I also am an Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin.

Do not doubt of God's mercy, His faithfulness stands sure. Indeed there are terrible examples of judgment and ruin all around, but there are many souls who have been taken into covenant with Him, have found Him a friend and helper, have had long experience of His goodness. God forbid that we should suppose any one would be cast away who trusts in Him.

2. God hath not cast away his people which he foreknew. Wot ye not what the scripture saith of Elias? how he maketh intercession to God against Israel, saying, 3. Lord, they have killed thy prophets, and digged down thine altars; and I am left alone, and they seek my life.

Elijah was full of grief and shame when he saw God's worship forsaken, His prophets slain, and the whole nation apparently become heathen. So some true hearts have to live where God's Name is daily blasphemed, where drunkenness and other sins abound, where believers meet only with scoffs. Their only comfort is to seek God, and pour out their heavy burden in His sight. He can protect them, and convert the hard hearts round them in His good time. Let them only not give up hoping and praying.

4. But what saith the answer of God unto him? I have reserved to myself seven thousand men, who have not bowed the knee to the image of Baal.

God sees His true servants. He hides them under His wings, strengthens them by His grace, guards them from falling. Our whole desire should be to belong to this blessed company rather than follow the broad way of the world. Oftentimes it needs courage not to bow down to Baal. His worshippers are mighty, His pleasures sweet, but God rewards and comforts those who hold out.

5. Even so then at this present time also there is a remnant according to the election of grace. 6. And if by grace, then is it no more of works: otherwise grace is no more grace. But if it be of works, then is it no more grace: otherwise work is no more work.

God's grace is free and undeserved. No Jewish privileges, no Christian good practices can earn His mercy. He is the Giver of all goodness; our part is to obey His Word and trust Him, then He will not fail us. Those Jews who trusted to their national holiness as being God's people missed Christ and His blessings. Those Christians who trust to a mere profession of religion, to the use of certain phrases or giving of certain alms, instead of a true conversion of heart, will find that they have thrown away the substance for the shadow.

7. *What then? Israel hath not obtained that which he seeketh for; but the election hath obtained it, and the rest were blinded*

Some obtain faith, others remain blind and deaf to God's truth. Lord, I have not found out this blessing for myself, but Thy grace rather has found me, has enlightened my eyes and given me a heart to love Thee. I ascribe this to Thy full and abundant mercy, not to any wisdom of my own.

8. (*According as it is written, God hath given them the spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear;) unto this day.*

Many live thus; they have no eye to see God's mercies, no ears to hear His warnings. Chastisements come upon them, and they heed not; occasions of grace pass by, and are disregarded. Who will wake them from this dangerous slumber before it be too late? Let us take care lest we fall into this state and know it not.

9. *And David saith, Let their table be made a snare, and a trap, and a stumblingblock, and a recompence unto them:*

This is the case of those who turn earthly wealth to their harm. Their souls are caught in their own abundance, and perish by it. And it is the case still more of those who turn spiritual blessings to their harm. What, so many Communions, so much church-going, frequent prayers, and an open Bible, yet all this only hardening the heart more and more! Such is God's righteous sentence on those who misuse His gifts.

10. *Let their eyes be darkened, that they may not see, and bow down their back alway.*

A true Christian looks up to heaven, and sees by faith God disposing all things and preparing a reward for His faithful servants; but mere professors keep their eyes fixed on this earth, and seek for

honour and pleasure here. They go through life with a gaze bent downward on the earth, on money, on men's applause, on sin's pleasures, and it is impossible to make them cast a glance upwards.

11. I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy.

The Jews rejected our Saviour, put Him to death, persecuted His followers, cast them out as heretics; yet all this was overruled by God's wisdom to bring about salvation for all people. He did not cause His chosen people to fall, that was their own doing; but He brought out of their fall wonderful fruits of blessing for all the world. Man's sins can only work out God's purposes, though man knows it not.

12. Now if the fall of them be the riches of the world, and the diminishing of them the riches of the Gentiles; how much more their fulness?

If Israel's disgrace is turned to our profit, what will Israel's honour be? The God of Abraham has not forgotten His people: one day He will break their chain, will turn their darkness into light, will show them that great salvation which they have so long refused to see. Lord, bring about that great day; let Thy ancient people be exalted again by a living faith.

13. For I speak to you Gentiles, inasmuch as I am the apostle of the Gentiles, I magnify mine office: 14. if by any means I may provoke to emulation them which are my flesh, and might save some of them.

Where is this zeal for souls now? S. Paul strove for the conversion of the Gentiles, worked for it, prayed for it, gave his life for it. Yet in all this he kept his own dear countrymen in view, desiring that they might be stirred up to inquire and believe by seeing the fruits of faith round them. His whole soul was taken up with the longing to bring men to Christ, and he tried all means to carry out this purpose.

15. For if the casting away of them be the reconciling of the world, what shall the receiving of them be, but life from the dead?

The conversion of a sinner is life from the dead. What will it be when God's Name is everywhere adored, His kingdom set up, His promises known? Will not this world be too poor to contain such mercies, and God's time then be at hand for changing it and bringing in a better?

16. For if the firstfruit be holy, the lump is also holy: and if the root be holy, so are the branches.

What great saints were Jews by birth ! what noble deeds, and inspired hymns, and devout prayers were given to the world through this nation ! They kept alive the knowledge and love of God for so many hundred years. Our Bibles for the most part were written by their hands and in their words. These thoughts bid us treat God's ancient people with respect, and hope for their conversion. God still remembers that they are His chosen family, and has designs of mercy for them.

17. And if some of the branches be broken off, and thou, being a wild olive tree, wert grafted in among them, and with them partakest of the root and fatness of the olive tree; 18. boast not against the branches. But if thou boast, thou bearest not the root, but the root thee.

The Church of God with its privileges and promises is like a fruitful tree into which we have been grafted by God's mercy. Now we enjoy spiritual life, now we bear fruits of grace, only let us remember that all that is good in us comes from God. Of ourselves we are but barren, lifeless branches, without love and holiness, unless His quickening grace renew us. Glory be to God's mercy for having joined us in our day to His holy Catholic Church ! May He make us living branches, and keep us from ever being broken off.

19. Thou wilt say then, The branches were broken off, that I might be grafted in.

How many have lost faith ! how many are in bondage to deadly sin ! God has enabled me to believe firmly, to fight against evil, to have a good hope of salvation. He has passed over numbers of hearts far more innocent and more worthy than mine to pour out on me the treasures of His grace. Ah, let such thoughts make me tremble; how easily I too might lose my hope !

20. Well; because of unbelief they were broken off, and thou standest by faith. Be not highminded, but fear : 21. for if God spared not the natural branches, take heed lest he also spare not thee.

God's judgments should make us fear. Angels fell. Adam fell in Eden. The Jews lost their place as God's people. Numbers of Christians have fallen away. What are we, that we should think ourselves secure ? A cautious temper that bears in mind our own weakness and the strength of temptation is the most fitting for this world.

22. Behold therefore the goodness and severity of God : on them which fell, severity ; but toward thee, goodness, if thou continue in his goodness : otherwise thou also shalt be cut off.

This is what the Psalmist said, "My song shall be of mercy and

judgment." God has been full of love and mercy to all, and yet I can see around me His awful judgments. I must not so look at one side as to forget the other. The thought of His goodness encourages me to persevere. The thought of His severe justice keeps me back from sin. Lord, I desire a temper made up rightly of these two, love and fear.

23. And they also, if they abide not still in unbelief, shall be grafted in: for God is able to graff them in again. 24. For if thou wert cut out of the olive tree which is wild by nature, and wert grafted contrary to nature into a good olive tree: how much more shall these, which be the natural branches, be grafted into their own olive tree?

How can the Jews after so long a time of unbelief become Christian? How can they get to acknowledge our Lord as the Christ after having striven so carefully to explain all the prophecies in another sense? Have they not the memory of ill-usage and contempt received from Christians to keep them separate from us? Nay, God is able. His power can do what man cannot. His glorious grace can open their eyes and show them Christ's sufferings and glory figured by the prophets, His teaching as the perfection of the Law, His Death as the prevailing sacrifice. Lord, hasten the day when such things may be.

25. For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in.

This was the mystery, that God had for a while blinded the eyes of His ancient people so that they did not recognise His promised salvation when it came, while the Gentiles did recognise it. Such a great reverse in spiritual things should make us watchful over ourselves, lest we lose our blessings as the Jews did. Yet we may look forward to their being enlightened in time to come. God's ancient people will one day be His fold again.

26. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:

O great Deliverer, let the time approach to convert all who are still outside Thy Church, and do Thou kindle the cold hearts and relieve the burdened consciences that are within it already. They need Thy grace to set them free. Let Thy holy city be all free, and pure, and loyal to Thy service, not enslaved by Satan any more.

27. For this is my covenant unto them, when I shall take away their sins.

There is a great difference between the Jewish and the Christian covenant. Both indeed bind men to give up sin and keep God's commandments; but the former gave only an outward rule, without much inward help to do right or inward forgiveness for sin, while the latter is a living law, abounding in peace, in grace, in light.

28. As concerning the gospel, they are enemies for your sakes: but as touching the election, they are beloved for the fathers' sakes. 29. For the gifts and calling of God are without repentance.

God has not forgotten His saints, they still live before Him; nor have they forgotten us. No doubt their prayers for us are more earnest and more prevailing now than while they were on earth. They plead before God for the salvation of their brethren who are still in this world of trouble. What God has done can never be altered. His mercy, His calling, His gifts stand sure; no unfaithfulness of ours can change Him.

30. For as ye in times past have not believed God, yet have now obtained mercy through their unbelief: 31. even so have these also now not believed, that through your mercy they also may obtain mercy.

God used the unbelief of the Jews to further His great designs. He knows how to bring fruits of grace even out of man's sin. All things are overruled by His wise Providence. When we were unbelieving, His mercy waited for us, and in due time spoke to our hearts and won us to accept His truth. Lord, how many there are who do not believe! do Thou in mercy open their eyes and touch their hearts, that their turn may come to join with us in creeds and prayers.

32. For God hath concluded them all in unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all.

Thus the apostle ends his great argument. Man forgot God, but God had mercy on man. Our own vileness and fallen state were plainly manifested,—we had lost God, and so lost ourselves; but yet this sad state called for and brought out pardoning mercy to restore us again. What a dreadful depth is man's sin! what a glorious depth is God's mercy! both are unsearchable.

33. O the depth of the riches both of the wisdom and knowledge of God! how unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!

"God is in heaven, and thou upon earth, therefore let thy words be few." It is our best wisdom to allow that we know Him not as He is, neither can know Him. We adore His infinite perfections, but we are too weak, short-lived, and foolish to comprehend the

whole plan of His government. Perhaps in eternity we may have a further view of these great matters than is possible here.

34. For who hath known the mind of the Lord? or who hath been his counsellor?

Earthly kings have counsellors who know their designs and give them advice, but God needs no counsel from us. His plans have to do with eternity, and the little fragment of them that comes before our notice as we go through this life is not sufficient for us to pass judgment on. Common people do not enter into the designs of a great statesman or conqueror, he sees farther than they do; but God's mind and wisdom are infinitely deeper than those of the wisest of His creatures. There is no comparison between Him and us.

35. Or who hath first given to him, and it shall be recompensed unto him again?

All is of grace. Our creation, our first calling, our faith, our perseverance, our heavenly reward, are all the gifts of His free mercy. Of ourselves we cannot win pardon or see the right way. Lord, let it be my glory always to throw myself at the feet of Thy mercy and acknowledge that I owe Thee everything. All that I have in nature or in grace comes of Thy goodness, let me give it back to Thee daily by thanksgiving.

36. For of him, and through him, and to him, are all things: to whom be glory for ever. Amen.

Glory be to my God, Who created all things, and preserves them in being, and guides them to their proper end! I acknowledge His glory in creating, and redeeming, and in sanctifying. It would be folly for me to seek my own glory. I desire only to join with God's saints and servants in ascribing all power and glory for evermore to the One God, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. What I can understand I adore, and for what is beyond my reach I trust entirely to Him.

CHAPTER XII.

- 1. God's mercies must move us to please God. 3. No man must think too well of himself, 6. but attend every one on that calling wherein he is placed. 9. Love, and many other duties, are required of us. 19. Revenge is specially forbidden.

I BESEECH you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service.

God's mercies are so great and numberless. He has created and redeemed me. His love has given me victory, peace, a good hope of salvation, comfort even in trouble. I cannot reckon up all the mercies that I have received, but I know that they constrain me to offer myself to Him. My tongue must speak truth, my hands work righteousness, my whole body be kept in purity, ready to do His will.

2. And be not conformed to this world: but be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect, will of God.

This verse tells me what to put aside—this world with its selfish, vain corrupting principles; and what to follow—God's will, which teaches me only what is pure and true. Oh for courage to stand up against the world and choose God's side!

3. For I say, through the grace given unto me, to every man that is among you, not to think of himself more highly than he ought to think; but to think soberly, according as God hath dealt to every man the measure of faith.

In religion sober thoughts about oneself are best. God has given to us one Faith and one Saviour, but He does not give the same tasks to all, or require the same gifts from all. We are happy if we fill a humble place in quietness and patience without any loud professions or high thoughts of our spiritual state.

4. For as we have many members in one body, and all members have not the same office: 5. so we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another.

We depend on each other for help and comfort, as the different limbs in a body have each need of the others' wellbeing. Our souls all derive spiritual life from our Saviour, yet this blessing comes through our brethren to us, and passes on from us to our brethren. What use is a limb severed from the body? so it would be with me if I were to lead a selfish life.

6. Having then gifts differing according to the grace that is given to us, whether prophecy, let us prophesy according to the proportion of faith;

If I have to teach God's truth, let it be His truth, not my own fancy that I teach. All light comes from Him; how can I enlighten any one except He guide me? I must learn from Him by daily prayer and study of Scripture what to believe and teach.

7. Or ministry, let us wait on our ministering: or he that teacheth, on teaching;

If my work is to wait on my brethren, and receive orders from them,

let my first object be to do this work. Christ our Lord came to minister. He shows me a pattern of ready, cheerful obedience. If I have to teach children or the ignorant, let me gladly suit myself to them and not be impatient. God is my Master, and I am but a slow learner; let this thought make me forbearing.

8. Or he that exhorteth, on exhortation : he that giveth, let him do it with simplicity ; he that ruleth, with diligence ; he that sheweth mercy, with cheerfulness.

If I have to advise, I will give the best advice I can. In giving alms, I will meet the present need as I can, regarding myself as the channel of God's bounty to such a one. He is full of mercy, and sends through me some help to His afflicted servant. In ruling my household, I will take pains and do my best to keep all things in order, and all persons serving God in peace and love. In forgiving a transgressor or comforting a sorrowful soul, I will remember those free mercies which God so readily and abundantly has bestowed on me.

9. Let love be without dissimulation. Abhor that which is evil ; cleave to that which is good.

True love requires this salt in it to keep it pure. It loves and clings to other dear souls, and delights in their good qualities ; but it is loyal to God, and loves Him most of all, so that it will never give Him up for the sake of pleasing them.

10. Be kindly affectioned one to another with brotherly love ; in honour preferring one another ;

True love is full of tenderness, feeling for our brother's needs and endeavouring to spare him any vexation or pain ; it is also modest and reverent, putting friends first, and missing no tokens of respect which they might claim. Do not think such things are trifles. Christ our Saviour took notice of them (S. Luke vii. 44).

11. Not slothful in business ; fervent in spirit ; serving the Lord ;

True love is earnest both in praying and working. What a shame it would be to be remiss on God's errands while the servants of this world are so busy for earthly ends ! Let me pray with my whole heart, let me work with my whole strength. I shall have time enough to rest in eternity.

12. Rejoicing in hope ; patient in tribulation ; continuing instant in prayer ;

True love has a spring of joy that never fails ; no disappointment or trials can rob the believer of his heavenly Friend, with Whom he holds communion now, and Whom he looks forward with sure hope

to beholding hereafter. When tribulations come let my prayer be deeper and more earnest, thus I shall still have joy.

13. Distributing to the necessity of saints ; given to hospitality.

True love does not end in words or feelings, but goes out into acts of kindness. Such a one is sick, is poor, is away from friends ; then love is ready to share with him and help him on his way. Why has God given me enough and to spare ? For this end, that I might share it wisely and liberally with my brethren.

14. Bless them which persecute you : bless, and curse not.

Do not revile those who ill-use you, but bear in mind that Christ died for them as for you, and that after this world's misunderstandings are removed you hope to meet them again and find them seeking your forgiveness. Our lips which bless God should not curse any of His creatures.

15. Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep.

This does not mean mere feigned compliments or formal words of condolence, but a true love for our friends which makes us share in their happiness or their grief. Who shall teach our selfish hearts to feel thus ? Only Jesus our Lord can do it. He has the secret of true sympathy ; all through His life He showed Himself a true Friend.

16. Be of the same mind one toward another. Mind not high things, but condescend to men of low estate. Be not wise in your own conceits.

This is the rule of inward peace. Let me try to pass through life on this plan, treating all men courteously and kindly, giving up my own way, learning readily and thankfully from those who know more than I do. If I had always behaved thus, how much more good I should have done !

17. Recompense to no man evil for evil. Provide things honest in the sight of all men.

I owe my neighbour one debt at least, and that is a good example. I am bound to rule my tongue, guide my family, settle my affairs, without giving offence to any one if I can avoid it. I should live a Christian life, that my children, my household, and my friends may learn to do the same.

18. If it be possible, as much as lieth in you, live peaceably with all men.

This is a hard rule, for pride resents affronts ; and then God's truth, and His holiness, and the cause of Christ's Church are sometimes

like swords separating us from other men. Sometimes war is our condition so long as we live here ; only let it not be our fault that there is not peace. We must labour for it, pray for it, guard it zealously.

19. Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath : for it is written, Vengeance is mine ; I will repay, saith the Lord. 20. Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him ; if he thirst, give him drink : for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head.

What are these coals of fire which forgiveness heaps on an enemy's head? Not surely coals of wrath or of pain, but a fire of love which will warm his cold heart and burn away all the fancied insult. He resisted your just rights and peaceable words, but when you forget all the strife, and are only bent on doing him a kindness, then he must give way. This will be a happy revenge, to make him feel that he is in the wrong.

21. Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good.

There are two great hosts, the armies of evil and of good. Whose soldier are you? Be not a slave carried off by the evil powers, and made to fight on their side and do their work ; but be a brave soldier in God's army, manfully fighting against sin, the world, and the devil, and rescuing poor captives from Satan's hold. God's army is sure to beat in the end ; let His soldiers keep on fighting and the victory is theirs.

CHAPTER XIII.

1. Subjection, and many other duties, we owe to the magistrates. 8. Love is the fulfilling of the law. 11. Gluttony and drunkenness, and the works of darkness, are out of season in the time of the gospel.

*L*ET every soul be subject unto the higher powers. For there is no power but of God : the powers that be are ordained of God. 2. Whosoever therefore resisteth the power, resisteth the ordinance of God : and they that resist shall receive to themselves damnation.

Christ's kingdom does not interfere with the powers of this world. They rule us in matters that belong to this life, and require due obedience and reverence from us. The Sovereign and her officers are set over us by God and represent Him to us. Christians should, then, be loyal subjects, good citizens, ready to take their part in all public duties. It is God's will we should belong to such or such a nation, and should work and pray for its welfare.

3. For rulers are not a terror to good works, but to the evil. Wilt thou then not be afraid of the power? do that which is good, and thou shalt have praise of the same: 4. for he is the minister of God to thee for good. But if thou do that which is evil, be afraid; for he beareth not the sword in vain: for he is the minister of God, a revenger to execute wrath upon him that doeth evil.

God has appointed civil government for this end, to put down evil ways and protect peaceful, sober, orderly people in their daily work. It is of God's mercy that we have a government over us, and do not live as wild beasts, at the mercy of craft or violence. Our houses are protected, our lives secure, robbers, murderers, cheats afraid to show their faces and obliged to hide from justice, —are these small benefits?

5. Wherefore ye must needs be subject, not only for wrath, but also for conscience sake.

I obey the laws, I honour the Sovereign, I pay respect to magistrates, not merely lest I should get into trouble, but because I know God's will is so. If the prince were to enjoin me what is wrong, I have a Master in heaven Whose commands come first, but in things indifferent I obey gladly and willingly.

6. For for this cause pay ye tribute also: for they are God's ministers, attending continually upon this very thing.

Here is a kind of priesthood, not that of the Church, but of civil governors. Kings and judges are God's ministers appointed to offer up to Him the continual sacrifice of righteousness done and evil punished. O Lord, put into the hearts of our Sovereign and her ministers, into the hearts of judges and magistrates, this losty notion of their duties. God has chosen, called, separated them on purpose that they may give their whole strength to guide His people. How high and Divine is their office! Lord, grant them hearts to feel it.

7. Render therefore to all their dues: tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honour to whom honour.

Even tax-paying is an offering made to God, and should be done honestly and readily. As I offer my money in church to maintain the heavenly kingdom and its services, so I offer my money to the tax-gatherer towards keeping up the earthly kingdom. Both are from God, and I recognise Him both in Church and State.

8. Owe no man any thing, but to love one another: for he that loveth another hath fulfilled the law.

Pay all other debts and have done with them. Debt is a slavery which leads men to disgrace and ruin. But there is one debt from which we are never free, and which enriches, not impoverishes us, that is the debt of love. Lord, give me power always to pay what I owe; and above all to pay the honour, thanks, duty, obedience, and kindness which so many may justly claim from me.

9. For this, Thou shalt not commit adultery, Thou shalt not kill, Thou shalt not steal, Thou shalt not bear false witness, Thou shalt not covet ; and if there be any other commandment, it is briefly comprehended in this saying, namely, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself.

So the Catechism says, "My duty towards my neighbour is, to love him as myself, and to do to all men as I would they should do unto me." Here I find the whole Decalogue, in short, under the one head of love. All impurity, all hatred, all lies, all covetousness would pass away if I but regarded my brethren as God's ransomed creatures like myself, meant for heaven, and having the same claims, and needs, and rights as I have.

10. Love worketh no ill to his neighbour : therefore love is the fulfilling of the law.

Here is all Scripture summed up in one word, Love. O Lord, give me this one indispensable gift, kindle it in my heart by prayer, cherish it by works of kindness, drive far from me a selfish, unfeeling temper, let me find peace in loving Thee and ministering to Thy children.

11. And that, knowing the time, that now it is high time to awake out of sleep : for now is our salvation nearer than when we believed.

Here is a call to awake. Shall we dream on idly while life is running out, grace calls, and eternity draws near? Those are asleep who live for this present world. Even if they seem busy it is only walking in sleep; no one is awake who does not see God, and sin, and death, and the path of duty. Lord, thunder in my ears with this call, that I may awake and work for Thee.

12. The night is far spent, the day is at hand : let us therefore cast off the works of darkness, and let us put on the armour of light.

O Christian, get up, you have much work to do, a great fight to wage, a long journey to take. Will you remain idle or worse, when your Lord calls you by such loud knocks and so many warnings? This world and all its follies will soon have passed away like the shades of night at sunrising.

13. Let us walk honestly, as in the day ; not in rioting and

drunkenness, not in chambering and wantonness, not in strife and envying.

Daylight requires a wakeful mind and steady walk. God and angels see us, all we do will be known. Many wrap themselves round in darkness still; but in vain, they cannot hide from God's eye. Keep us, O Lord, from the three dangers mentioned here, from indulgence in drink, from deadly sins of the flesh, from a bitter, jealous temper. How can we get free from them but by Thy help?

14. But put ye on the Lord Jesus Christ, and make not provision for the flesh, to fulfil the lusts thereof.

How can I put on Christ? Let me wear outwardly His modesty, His kindness, His uprightness; let me cover the stains of my soul with His atoning righteousness, and thus be fit to stand before God; let me seek in prayer and Holy Communion to become one spirit with Him, hating what He hates and loving what He loves. A life after the flesh will be only misery to look back on, all its pleasures will turn shortly to dust and ashes.

CHAPTER XIV.

3. Men may not contemn nor condemn one the other for things indifferent : 13. but take heed that they give no offence in them : 15. for that the apostle proveth unlawful by many reasons.

HIM that is weak in the faith receive ye, but not to doubtful disputations.

Souls are won, not by dispute and arguments, but by the power of love. We should welcome each other as fellow-servants in God's family, and sharers of a common faith and hope, without insisting on an absolute agreement in all things. God's Word leaves some points open, and us free so far to think or do as we will. Let us not make the way to heaven narrower than need be.

2. For one believeth that he may eat all things : another, who is weak, eateth herbs. 3. Let not him that eateth despise him that eateth not ; and let not him which eateth not judge him that eateth : for God hath received him.

Some Christians felt free from the Law, there was no more difference between clean and unclean for them; others observed its rules about food, and even left off meat altogether for fear of offending by eating some unclean food. The apostle bids those who were free not to ridicule the more scrupulous who out of reverence for the Law still observed it, and he bids the more scrupulous not to blame

their bolder brethren, not to call them profane or ungodly. He reminds us that we are all fellow-members of Christ.

4. Who art thou that judgest another man's servant? to his own master he standeth or falleth. Yea, he shall be holden up: for God is able to make him stand.

Be not over hasty to blame another Christian in things that are not plainly sin. Follow the judgment of charity, remember that God approves and guides very many who differ exceedingly from us. Many true servants of Christ will be acknowledged before earth and heaven at the last day whom we knew not of, and would have condemned if we had known.

5. One man esteemeth one day above another: another esteemeth every day alike. Let every man be fully persuaded in his own mind.

It was not yet forbidden to Christians to observe the Law; a converted Jew might still, if he pleased, keep the legal fasts and festivals, while another could see plainly that all those had now passed away. S. Paul strove to keep Christians at one, he said that this observing or putting away the Law need make no difference between those who had a common faith and love.

6. He that regardeth the day, regardeth it unto the Lord; and he that regardeth not the day, to the Lord he doth not regard it. He that eateth, eateth to the Lord, for he giveth God thanks; and he that eateth not, to the Lord he eateth not, and giveth God thanks.

When shall we learn this lesson, to do everything for God, not for ourselves? Sundays and working days ought alike to be spent with Christ in view, and as He would have us. Dainty fare or scanty fare ought alike to be sanctified with thanksgiving to our merciful Lord Who bestows it on us. All days are to give us time, all food to give us strength, to do our Lord's work, of whatever kind it be.

7. For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. 8. For whether we live, we live unto the Lord; and whether we die, we die unto the Lord: whether we live therefore, or die, we are the Lord's.

We are bought with a price; no one can command all our love, enjoin all our duty, guide all our conscience, except Christ only. It is sufficient if we please Him. Not death itself, which ends all other engagements, can set us free from this dear and holy service. I rejoice to find myself under so good a Lord, and beseech Him never to let me go, or let anything come between my soul and Him.

9. For to this end Christ both died, and rose, and revived, that he might be Lord both of the dead and living.

"In birth and life our Comrade He,
Our Food at Supper He would be,
He is our Ransom on the tree,
Our Joy to all eternity."

10. But why dost thou judge thy brother? or why dost thou set at nought thy brother? for we shall all stand before the judgment seat of Christ.

The thought of judgment to come should check our hasty judgments here. I will not be very ready to condemn as ungodly, or despise as over scrupulous, a soul beside whom I may have to stand before the Judgment Throne. In the light of that awful day my own sins will seem so grave that I shall think less of those that my friends have committed. I have quite enough to do in answering for myself.

11. For it is written, As I live, saith the Lord, every knee shall bow to me, and every tongue shall confess to God. 12. So then every one of us shall give account of himself to God.

This world's costly thrones, great names, and loud judgments will soon have passed away utterly, not a trace left of them, only we ourselves alone with our true Judge. How wonderful it seems to reflect that all in which we place such dependence will soon have vanished, and only eternal truths remain! Lord, I would fain so live as one who has to die and to appear before Thee.

13. Let us not therefore judge one another any more: but judge this rather, that no man put a stumblingblock or an occasion to fall in his brother's way.

This is the clearest rule of all, to live in peace, and to avoid vexing others in things where God has left us free. How much I shall have to answer for if I have caused any one to fall into sin or lose their faith! God keep me from falling and from dragging down some other ransomed soul with mine.

14. I know, and am persuaded by the Lord Jesus, that there is nothing unclean of itself: but to him that esteemeth any thing to be unclean, to him it is unclean.

God has made us free, no kind of food that we may eat or liquor that we may drink has power of itself to touch our conscience. The old law which said, "Touch not, taste not, handle not," is gone. Still Christians are free to give up this or that for the sake of self-denial, or to obey the customs of the Church, or for the benefit of their own minds or bodies. Let our rule in such matters be simplicity, and giving up our own pleasure, and enjoying only what is for our good.

15. But if thy brother be grieved with thy meat, now walkest thou not charitably. Destroy not him with thy meat, for whom Christ died.

This meant, if Gentile Christians ate things which Moses' Law forbade, they might grieve and upset Jewish Christians, and throw them off from Christ's Church altogether. Sooner than that, they should abridge their own liberty. For me this verse means that I should be careful to give no offence. I have liberty to do all things which are not positively wrong, and yet I may not do them if God's people are likely to be offended thereby, and irreligious men encouraged. Let me think of others as well as of myself.

16. Let not then your good be evil spoken of: 17. for the kingdom of God is not meat and drink; but righteousness, and peace, and joy in the Holy Ghost.

There the Church is flourishing where are righteous lives, peaceful hearts, and a delight in things heavenly. Outward habits and ways may differ extremely so long as these three necessary gifts are found. No one will be able to speak ill of us if we keep the rule of righteousness, follow peace, and take pleasure in serving God heartily. This is the prosperity which we should desire for the Church, that such graces may be multiplied.

18. For he that in these things serveth Christ is acceptable to God, and approved of men.

O happy life that pleases God, and imitates Christ, and gains the goodwill of men! Religion is after all "the way of pleasantness," "all her paths are peace." Sin is applauded for a while, but men find out before long that a Christian is the best neighbour, the best servant, the best friend.

19. Let us therefore follow after the things which make for peace, and things wherewith one may edify another.

Here is an object for our lives, to encourage peace, and help one another towards heaven. Repeat nothing, arrange nothing, pray for nothing that is not in harmony with this end. O Lord, how differently I should have talked if I had had this verse in mind before! it shows me what my words at least ought to have been, but are not.

20. For meat destroy not the work of God. All things indeed are pure; but it is evil for that man who eateth with offence.

Charity and peace are God's work; faith, too, and the spread of the Gospel: also each redeemed soul is God's work, made by Him and new-made in Christ. How grievous it would be by some heedless act or word to destroy all this, to quench Divine grace

and ruin a soul; and yet men do so daily for the sake of mere trifles! Thus they turn all things to evil, though God made them good and for good ends.

21. It is good neither to eat flesh, nor to drink wine, nor any thing whereby thy brother stumbleth, or is offended, or is made weak.

I will give up willingly pleasures that I might enjoy without sin, if in taking them I offend or grieve others, or make them think evil of me. Let me not grudge the sacrifice. I am too happy to be able to offer any sacrifice to God, Who has done such things for me. A dainty morsel, a pleasant draught, a happy hour are offerings which we may sacrifice to our God, and which will be accepted for Christ's sake, Who "pleased not Himself."

22. Hast thou faith? have it to thyself before God. Happy is he that condemneth not himself in that thing which he alloweth. 23. And he that doubteth is damned if he eat, because he eateth not of faith: for whatsoever is not of faith is sin.

Conscience is our first teacher; never mind the world's maxims, that bid you do this or that without scruple, but remember that you must not neglect the inward voice which warns you back. We are happy when our own hearts approve our way and tell us that there is no wrong in what we are doing, but we are miserable if we stifle the voice and shut our ears to the warning. If I am not sure that an act is right for me to do, it is better to keep from it. Unless a thing is plainly mine I will not touch it. If I should be ashamed of any one's knowing my thoughts, I am sure they are not good thoughts for me.

CHAPTER XV.

1. The strong must bear with the weak. 2. We may not please ourselves, 3. for Christ did not so, 7. but receive one the other, as Christ did us all, 8. both Jews & Gentiles. 15. Paul excuseth his writing, 28. and promiseth to see them, 30. and requesteth their prayers.

WE then that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak, and not to please ourselves.

Why does God bestow good gifts of learning, genius, wealth, upon any? For their brethren's sake, that they may help and comfort them on their way. Many are weak, weighed down by fear and doubts, ignorant, sorely tempted. We whose lot is a happier one are bound to stretch out a hand of kindness to them.

2. Let every one of us please his neighbour for his good to edification.

This is a very different thing from pleasing our neighbour for evil and to lead him astray. It is not meant that we should flatter, bribe, or indulge him, but have a sincere and hearty wish to do him good. Should I not try to be at peace with all Christ's people, and regard them as my friends?

3. For even Christ pleased not himself; but, as it is written, The reproaches of them that reproached thee fell on me.

Here is our Pattern. Christ our Lord might have remained in heavenly glory, but He took on Himself the burden of a suffering life, and this for our sakes. He went out of His way to encounter reproach and shame. What a contrast to our selfish life!

4. For whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope.

Holy Scripture has treasures of patience and comfort for us. Its histories, warnings, prayers, counsels, are all meant to make us pass stedfastly through this present world, and take cheerfully the sorrows that come, in the hope of God's mercy. Lord, make me a lover of Thy Holy Word, let me draw from it a daily store of light and strength. What hope have I but in Thee?

5. Now the God of patience and consolation grant you to be like minded one toward another according to Christ Jesus: 6. that ye may with one mind and one mouth glorify God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ.

The world has its comforts and its associations, but Christians know of a better consolation and truer union. What are outward differences compared with this oneness of faith, and praise, and hope which joins true believers together! We should delight to join in the praise which God's Church offers, and to confess the Catholic Faith which she teaches.

7. Wherefore receive ye one another, as Christ also received us to the glory of God.

Gentile and Jew, rich and poor, master and servant, are members of one Church, have been baptized at the same font, fed at the same Holy Table, taught the same faith in redemption. Does not this give us an interest in each other's welfare? If we are members of Christ and heirs of heaven, it befits us to have patience in our conduct towards our brethren.

8. Now I say that Jesus Christ was a minister of the cir-

cumcision for the truth of God, to confirm the promises made unto the fathers :

Why was the Lord of Glory born as a Jew? His mother, His nation, His life and its outward habits, the scene of His earthly footsteps, the language in which He spoke, all is of Palestine. He did not tread on English soil nor use our tongue. This was so, to honour God's old saints, and fulfil His promises. The Jews had inherited and preserved true religion, therefore its last and greatest gifts were first shown among them.

9. *And that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy ; as it is written, For this cause I will confess to thee among the Gentiles, and sing unto thy name.*

Salvation began among the Jews, but did not end there. Mercy spread to those who looked not for it. The mighty Roman Empire with its iron uniformity, the barbarian customs with their cruelties and superstitions, had to let mercy in. Behold, good tidings of great joy! Hearts can believe, and hope, and love. There is a home beyond the grave.

10. *And again he saith, Rejoice, ye Gentiles, with his people.*
11. *And again, Praise the Lord, all ye Gentiles ; and laud him, all ye people.*

When the light of faith enters a soul, is it not a time for joy? God's greatness, the excellency of Jesus Christ, the comfort of the Holy Spirit, what are we that such prospects should open on our inward sight? Many simple and poor persons, who had little cause for earthly joy, have found subjects of rejoicing in God's promises. Here has been their happiness.

12. *And again, Esaias saith, There shall be a root of Jesse, and he that shall rise to reign over the Gentiles ; in him shall the Gentiles trust.*

“Earthly friends must change and falter,
Earthly hearts must vary.”

Here is One Who will not deceive our trust; His Kingdom outlasts earth, His mercy is greater than our sins, all people can find a Friend in Him.

13. *Now the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace in believing, that ye may abound in hope, through the power of the Holy Ghost.*

Away with strife! What! have we such a faith, such a hope, such a Guide, and shall we be at variance amongst ourselves? Lord, I would fain feel what these first Christians felt; why do I believe so weakly, hope so faintly, feel so little of this power and strength of the Divine Comforter?

14. *And I myself also am persuaded of you, my brethren, that ye also are full of goodness, filled with all knowledge, able also to admonish one another.*

S. Paul, so enlightened, and having such power from God, yet takes pains to recommend his warnings and teachings by some kind words of compliment. How far he was from that harsh, imperious way in which we often rule or advise our brethren! He had himself both the qualities which he here notices, goodness and knowledge, both heart and head filled with God's Spirit, and we need them both if we would admonish to any purpose.

15. *Nevertheless, brethren, I have written the more boldly unto you in some sort, as putting you in mind, because of the grace that is given to me of God, 16. that I should be the minister of Jesus Christ to the Gentiles, ministering the gospel of God, that the offering up of the Gentiles might be acceptable, being sanctified by the Holy Ghost.*

This was S. Paul's office, to be a kind of high priest over the Gentile world, perpetually offering up in sacrifice to God new converts from heathenism. This was his offering, the souls and bodies of converted men, now dedicated to the true and living God to be His for eternity. What a precious sacrifice! shall we not give our time, and means, and prayers to provide such for God? How many souls still remain outside the Gospel!

17. *I have therefore whereof I may glory through Jesus Christ in those things which pertain to God.*

He had plain proof of his calling in the wonderful results which God had wrought by his means. Yet this glorying was in Christ's power, not his own, and came of God's gift, not of his own resources. In this world's judgment he was nobody, but in the sight of God he had a great work and a high office. Our glory should be of this kind, dependent on heaven, not on earth.

18. *For I will not dare to speak of any of those things which Christ hath not wrought by me, to make the Gentiles obedient, by word and deed, 19. through mighty signs and wonders, by the power of the Spirit of God; so that from Jerusalem, and round about unto Illyricum, I have fully preached the gospel of Christ.*

What greater joy could there be than to feel that God had used my life and work to build up His Kingdom, that by me dark places had been enlightened, wild natures subdued, faith and prayer planted in cold hearts? What could any one desire more than to feel this? Lord, Thine arm is not shortened now. Let us in these

days trust in Thy power and do some work for Thee. Glory be to Thee for the wonders which Thy saints wrought! yet there are more still in store,

20. Yea, so have I strived to preach the gospel, not where Christ was named, lest I should build upon another man's foundation: 21. but as it is written, To whom he was not spoken of, they shall see: and they that have not heard shall understand.

This is a missionary's work, to lay the first foundations of Christian faith. How many heathen there are still who have never received the message of salvation! and this not in distant countries only, but in the midst of a Christian land. Their eyes see earthly wonders, but not God's gracious work; their ears are open to this world's news, but they care not for the Gospel.

22. For which cause also I have been much hindered from coming to you.

Fresh work rose up before the apostle wherever he went. He felt the charge which Christ had laid upon him to preach salvation to all who knew it not. What a message, and for how great a King, and how gloriously obeyed! Poverty would not have hindered his going to Rome, nor danger, nor trouble; but when he came on unbelievers, that stopped him at once, he had to plead with them and tell them about God. That was his first task.

23. But now having no more place in these parts, and having a great desire these many years to come unto you; 24. whosoever I take my journey into Spain, I will come to you: for I trust to see you in my journey, and to be brought on my way thitherward by you, if first I be somewhat filled with your company.

S. Paul made his plans, but God fulfilled them in His own way. He appointed the apostle two years of imprisonment at Cæsarea, and two at Rome. That great zeal for the world's good had to be confined within the narrow limits of a prison, and those far-reaching missionary journeys brought to an end. When our plans, even for some good work, do not take effect, let us rejoice to submit the whole to God's Providence, knowing that His Will is best.

25. But now I go unto Jerusalem to minister unto the saints. 26. For it hath pleased them of Macedonia and Achaia to make a certain contribution for the poor saints which are at Jerusalem.

S. Paul often speaks in his letters of this good work of charity. The Jews at Jerusalem who had embraced the Gospel were in great dis-

tress, and the Gentiles who had now become their brethren in faith were glad to find an opportunity of helping them. Christian faith breaks down barriers of race and language ; it makes us rejoice to hear of converts in other parts of the globe, and feel for their sufferings.

27. It hath pleased them verily ; and their debtors they are. For if the Gentiles have been made partakers of their spiritual things, their duty is also to minister unto them in carnal things.

I am a debtor to so many ; not only do I owe my birth, my education, most of the comforts that I enjoy, to others' means, but I owe also the knowledge of God, the hope of heaven. What have I done to deserve God's abundant blessings, the prayers of dear friends, holy examples and warnings daily ? Indeed I owe an infinite debt. Let me show by my liberality and hearty love that I mean to be of some use in my turn. Thou hast, O Lord, been liberal to me; why should I be stingy towards Thy people?

28. When therefore I have performed this, and have sealed to them this fruit, I will come by you into Spain. 29. And I am sure that, when I come unto you, I shall come in the fulness of the blessing of the gospel of Christ.

He was a poor man in the world's estimation, yet his hands were full of alms for the necessities of the poor, and his life and heart full of blessings for weary, sinful, ignorant souls. What was the secret of his bringing blessings everywhere ? This above all, that he had Christ our Lord in his thoughts, told of Him, and turned to Him constantly.

30. Now I beseech you, brethren, for the Lord Jesus Christ's sake, and for the love of the Spirit, that ye strive together with me in your prayers to God for me;

Every one ought to bear his share in the prayers of Christ's Holy Church throughout the world. We may not be able to do much else, but that we can do. If I am anxious for the welfare of any, and feel it is beyond my power to help them, let me make up for my weakness by praying earnestly. Lord, prosper this work. Lord, keep these dear boys or girls from evil. Lord, bring light to this dark heart. It should be my earnest, daily, hearty work to pray thus.

31. That I may be delivered from them that do not believe in Judaea ; and that my service which I have for Jerusalem may be accepted of the saints ;

These two dangers hung over his way, hatred from the unbelieving Jews, coldness and suspicion even from those who were Christians. He bade his friends pray to God to disperse them, and yet it came

true as he feared. Were, then, the prayers wasted? No, they turned to his comfort, to his victory, to his deliverance in the end. Earnest intercession is never thrown away, though God does not prosper it just as we meant.

32. That I may come unto you with joy by the will of God, and may with you be refreshed. 33. Now the God of peace be with you all. Amen.

God's Will is above all, He brings order out of confusion. His peace is above all, He knows how and when to still the world's tumults. He grants us many seasons of refreshment here as an earnest of that perfect peace and joy which He has prepared in the world to come.

CHAPTER XVI.

3. Paul willeth the brethren to greet many, 17. and adviseth them to take heed of those which cause dissension and offences, 21. and after sundry salutations endeth with praise and thanks to God.

I COMMEND unto you Phebe our sister, which is a servant of the church which is at Cenchrea: 2. that ye receive her in the Lord, as becometh saints, and that ye assist her in whatsoever business she hath need of you: for she hath been a succourer of many, and of myself also.

Phebe had given herself up to do good works. Cenchrea was a busy seaport, and there must have been many sick and poor who needed her help. She was ready to help in any work for Christ or His poor. One day the great apostle came in her way to wait upon, and this glorious Epistle to be trusted with and taken to Rome; so she gained a lasting remembrance in Holy Scripture, and her name became known by all Christians. How richly God repaid her devotion!

3. Greet Priscilla and Aquila my helpers in Christ Jesus: 4. who have for my life laid down their own necks: unto whom not only I give thanks, but also all the churches of the Gentiles.

S. Paul remembers gratefully his good friends and hosts with whom he had spent many hours at Corinth in his former visit, who had prayed and worked with him, who had in some great danger rescued him at the peril of their own lives, and so preserved his ministry for the salvation of thousands. He reminds us how much we owe to our friends. Away with ungrateful, selfish, forgetful hearts!

5. Likewise greet the church that is in their house. Salute

my well-beloved Epænetus, who is the firstfruits of Achaia unto Christ.

The Christians had to assemble in small gatherings at the houses of such and such brethren for worship, as they were not yet allowed to build churches of their own or worship in public. How merciful is God in giving us freedom, and ample room, and convenient opportunities to praise Him! Yet perhaps there are not so many souls won to be fruits of God's grace now as there were then. S. Paul is careful not to miss out the names of any Christians at Rome whom he knew. He rejoiced to think of their good qualities and deeds.

6. *Greet Mary, who bestowed much labour on us.* 7. *Salute Andronicus and Junia, my kinsmen, and my fellow-prisoners, who are of note among the apostles, who also were in Christ before me.* 8. *Greet Amplias my beloved in the Lord.* 9. *Salute Urbane, our helper in Christ, and Stachys my beloved.* 10. *Salute Apelles approved in Christ.* Salute them which are of Aristobulus' household. 11. *Salute Herodion my kinsman.* Greet them that be of the household of Narcissus, which are in the Lord. 12. *Salute Tryphena and Tryphosa, who labour in the Lord.* Salute the beloved Persis, which laboured much in the Lord. 13. *Salute Rufus chosen in the Lord, and his mother and mine.* 14. *Salute Asyncritus, Phlegon, Hermas, Patrobas, Hermes, and the brethren which are with them.* 15. *Salute Philologus, and Julia, Nereus, and his sister, and Olympas, and all the saints which are with them.*

Here are a goodly company of saints mentioned, persons no doubt little regarded by the world. They lived in the great city without much share in its wealth or grandeur. Most of them were of humble station, their names are only known to us from this passage, but they lived and laboured "in the Lord;" He had chosen them, He was their sufficient portion and help. Instead of this world's treasures they had God's grace, the love and gratitude of Christians, blessings and mercies in their life here and eternal glory afterwards. These are worth labouring for, all else will pass away. What were great Rome and its imperial splendour compared with the worth of one true heart!

16. *Salute one another with an holy kiss. The churches of Christ salute you.*

It was the custom in those early days for the Christians at Divine service, before they received Holy Communion, to kiss one another in sign of charity. The men embraced the men, and the women the women; it was a holy kiss, and meant to express their union of heart and their love for each other. This has long been done away,

but let us still keep up what it signified by treating our brethren with courtesy and kindness. Are we not all God's children, meant by Him to live together in heaven? What dispositions are fit for such a prospect as this?

17. Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offences contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them.

The apostle adds one more urgent warning against those who divided Christians and put stumblingblocks in their way. Use his warning for a light to your own path; help forward union, not division; avoid causing offence to any; hand on the old doctrines which the Church has taught from the beginning. God grant us a spirit of peace, that we may draw Christians closer, instead of making rents worse.

18. For they that are such serve not our Lord Jesus Christ, but their own belly; and by good words and fair speeches deceive the hearts of the simple.

Good words and fair speeches abound, but how shall we discern true from false? How shall we tell who are Christ's servants, and who the slaves of their own passions? Lord, open our eyes that we may see Thy true servants and follow them along the way of life. How shall we escape the snares of deceivers but by Thy help? With Thee for our Guide we will not fear.

19. For your obedience is come abroad unto all men. I am glad therefore on your behalf: but yet I would have you wise unto that which is good, and simple concerning evil.

Obedience is good, but yet we ought to discern whom to obey, lest we be led wrong. This verse shows us a perfect Christian character, ready to obey God's Word and the orders of superiors; wise and able to see what is the right thing to say or do; simple concerning evil, not knowing, nor caring to know, anything of Satan's ways. This is true wisdom, to turn aside from evil, and say thankfully, Yes, I am ignorant of such things, and mean to remain so.

20. And the God of peace shall bruise Satan under your feet shortly. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Persevere for a little while, soon the end will come. The peace, the power, the grace of God through Jesus Christ are stronger than all that Satan can do. Indeed he may trouble our peace or buffet us now for a while, but yet our side will win. Let us cling fast to our merciful Lord and Friend when the assaults of Satan are fiercest, they will pass away and be forgotten.

21. Timotheus my workfellow, and Lucius, and Jason, and Sostipater, my kinsmen, salute you.

Timothy had been S. Paul's friend and helper for many years, and remained constant to him all his life. We know from the Epistles addressed to him how he loved the Holy Scriptures, how he warred a good warfare, and was a pattern to the Christians among whom he lived. These kinsmen of S. Paul's mentioned in this verse were no doubt Jews, and apparently of his own tribe, who were now united with him afresh by a common faith and love.

22. I Tertius, who wrote this epistle, salute you in the Lord.

As the apostle dictated this great Epistle Tertius wrote it down from his lips. What a happy task to catch and preserve for all time such deep truths and loving counsels! How attentively he must have listened and written! When we teach any one to know God's Word, we too write it in their hearts, only we must first have it in our own, so as to write a true copy.

23. Gaius mine host, and of the whole church, saluteth you. Erastus the chamberlain of the city saluteth you, and Quartus a brother. 24. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Gaius was hospitable to all Christians; his heart and hand were open to welcome them, he gave them a room to meet for Divine service. S. Paul had converted him (1 Cor. i. 14). What could be too much for his grateful heart to repay for so great a benefit! Erastus was a great man in Corinth, and had much business to do on behalf of the town; yet he was not ashamed to cast in his lot with despised Christians, to believe in the Cross, approach the Sacraments, and live for heaven. All these were knit with the Roman Christians in one communion of saints; faith, and prayer, and grace had made them all one.

25. Now to him that is of power to establish you according to my gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began, 26. but now is made manifest, and by the scriptures of the prophets, according to the commandment of the everlasting God, made known to all nations for the obedience of faith: 27. to God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

Glory be to God for His Divine plan of redemption! in it we see His power, wisdom, and mercy. Other ages knew not of it, or guessed at it dimly, but now we live in a time when it is set forth before all men; it is our part to believe and obey. Shall I be indifferent to the story of Christ's love? God designed it from all eternity,

prophets had thoughts about it, at last it has been revealed in all its depth and power. Nothing else in earth or heaven can reveal to me God's nature or my own heart save this only. O Lord, I am content to put my whole trust here, as Thy saints have done before me. What is still dark I commit to Thy wisdom, what is hard I trust to Thy power and love.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE CORINTHIANS.

CHAPTER I.

After his salutation and thanksgiving, 10. he exhorteth them to unity, and 12. reproveth their dissensions. 18. God destroyeth the wisdom of the wise, 21. by the foolishness of preaching, and 26. calleth not the wise, mighty, and noble, but 27, 28. the foolish, weak, and men of no account.

PAUL, called to be an apostle of Jesus Christ through the will of God, and Sosthenes our brother,

Paul was called by God's Will to be Christ's apostle. This was his strength; he could bear reproach, and opposition, and danger cheerfully, for he felt that he bore a message from the unseen King. What did men's enmity matter to one who was thus encouraged from above? We, too, have our callings. God has given us this work or that to do for Him, He has bidden us trade, or study, or write, or work with our hands, and all the time do His work and be known as His servants. Here is our strength, to have such a Master.

2. Unto the church of God which is at Corinth, to them that are sanctified in Christ Jesus, called to be saints, with all that in every place call upon the name of Jesus Christ our Lord, both their's and our's:

In the Church at Corinth were many unworthy Christians, yet the apostle addresses them as saints; they have been all made members of Christ and children of God. He remembers their conversion, their holy calling, their worship of one living Saviour, and loses sight in this of their individual shortcomings. It is a mistake to be discontented with the Church because there are many things imperfect among us. If we left it and set up a little church of our own, the devil would find a way in there also. Better to use what means we have in a spirit of prayer, and God will quicken our weak faith to discern His presence amongst us.

3. Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

The world wishes health and happiness, but Christians go higher, they want God's grace to keep them, His peace to reign in their hearts. Sickness, and pain, and trials may come, but they cannot quite uproot grace and peace from their place in a Christian home. Our heavenly Father and His dear Son remain full of goodness to us, whatever happens without.

4. I thank my God always on your behalf, for the grace of God which is given you by Jesus Christ;

What a blessing a thankful heart is, and one that rejoices in the prosperity of others! If we are pleased at their welldoing, we shall enjoy much happiness which a selfish person never dreams of. Paul had numberless troubles of his own, but he found great joy in seeing his friends favoured with heavenly blessings.

5. That in every thing ye are enriched by him, in all utterance, and in all knowledge; 6. even as the testimony of Christ was confirmed in you: 7. so that ye come behind in no gift; waiting for the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ:

The Corinthians were rich in utterance, in knowledge, and in expectation; the truth was well preached there, they heard it with intelligence, they looked forward to the full revelation to come. These are riches, yet what are they without love? Lord, make us rich in humility, give us simple and tender hearts; we do not want as yet to utter much, even to know much, we can wait for those gifts, but we desire not to lose Thy mercy now and the hope of beholding Thee hereafter.

8. Who shall also confirm you unto the end, that ye may be blameless in the day of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. God is faithful, by whom ye were called unto the fellowship of his Son Jesus Christ our Lord.

We do not trust in ourselves for perseverance. Sometimes our hearts fail to think of long life, and deadly temptations, and God's awful judgment, but yet again we remember His exceeding mercies to us. Has He not redeemed us, called us into His Church, made us enjoy fellowship with Him there? Be sure, therefore, that He cannot forsake us. He is faithful to keep His word.

10. Now I beseech you, brethren, by the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye all speak the same thing, and that there be no divisions among you; but that ye be perfectly joined together in the same mind and in the same judgment.

Here is an earnest entreaty, let us take notice of it. As faith is the foundation of the Church, so charity is the mortar which joins the stones to one another; without it they could not hold, the wall would be full of cracks. In God there is oneness of nature, but a fellowship of Persons; in Christ there is oneness of Person, but a

fellowship of natures ; so in the Church there must be a oneness of faith and a fellowship of joys and sorrows. If Christians are all divided in heart, where is their Christianity gone ?

11. For it hath been declared unto me of you, my brethren, by them which are of the house of Chlœ, that there are contentions among you. 12. Now this I say, that every one of you saith, I am of Paul; and I of Apollos; and I of Cephas; and I of Christ.

S. Paul hated contentions, it grieved him to find believers boasting that they belonged to this party or that party in the Church. No true servant of Christ could endure to see his brethren following him in preference to all others, and feeling pride in being known as his disciples. He would strive to lift their affections off himself on to Christ.

13. Is Christ divided? was Paul crucified for you? or were ye baptized in the name of Paul?

Christ the Lord is the Source of all blessings to us ; it is of His mercy alone that we believe, that we have life, that we persevere. How can we allow a mere man, however wise or eloquent, to come between us and our Divine Master ? He is the Sun by Whose rays all that is good in us has been quickened to life ; our favourite teachers at their very best can only reflect His brightness to us.

14. I thank God that I baptized none of you, but Crispus and Gaius; 15. lest any should say that I had baptized in mine own name. 16. And I baptized also the household of Stephanas: besides, I know not whether I baptized any other.

That is our Baptism, a pledge that we shall not be ashamed to confess the faith of Christ crucified, to fight under His banner, to be His faithful soldiers and servants. We do not become subject to any lord over our conscience, but to Christ only. Even the great apostle feared and avoided his friends taking him for their master. Let us sometimes ask ourselves, "Whose servant am I ? How am I doing my Lord's work ? Other friends may have brought me gifts from Him, but it was His love that sent them."

17. For Christ sent me not to baptize, but to preach the gospel: not with wisdom of words, lest the cross of Christ should be made of none effect.

We are members of Christ's Holy Catholic Church, not followers of any mere man. Our conversion and perseverance in grace depend on God's Spirit, not on the power of human words. It is God's love and power that saved the world and can save me. A very simple sermon, a homely book, a humble Christian may be used as instruments by which God works marvels for souls.

18. For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness ; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God.

Lord, give me eyes to discern Thy glorious power working in the history of the Passion, overcoming by shame, bringing hearts into subjection by love. Let me acknowledge all the misery, the disgrace, the helplessness of the Cross, and yet feel that there is the medicine for me. Great displays of power and wisdom profited me not, but in the Cross I see a healing love which meets my case.

19. For it is written, I will destroy the wisdom of the wise, and will bring to nothing the understanding of the prudent.

20. Where is the wise ? where is the scribe ? where is the disputer of this world ? hath not God made foolish the wisdom of this world ?

Man's wisdom can number the stars, can search out earth and sea, can pile up prudent counsels and lofty examples. Ah, but can it overcome temptation, or show a way through death? Can it take away the burden of guilt, or make up for a disappointed life? No, wisdom is quite helpless here. Away with it then! I will go by God's plan instead. He has in His Word something wiser than wisdom, and more suited to our capacity, something that will last when wisdom and the world are alike over.

21. For after that in the wisdom of God the world by wisdom knew not God, it pleased God by the foolishness of preaching to save them that believe.

“There is a book, who runs may read,
Which heavenly truth imparts,
And all the lore its scholars need,
Pure eyes and Christian hearts.”

That is the great book of the world in which God's glory is set forth in a thousand characters, but how shall we get pure eyes and Christian hearts to read them? This can only come of Divine grace; without it we stumble on in darkness, and fail to read the book of nature aright. The Gospel gives us the power to find out God there.

22. For the Jews require a sign, and the Greeks seek after wisdom :

The Jews desired miracles to amaze their eyes, the Greeks sought for talent, and admired good speakers; but God's way is different. He goes deeper, He bids us look within and behold Him in a pure heart. The world brings great sights and glorious words to delight us, but we turn from all this and long for something better.

23. But we preach Christ crucified, unto the Jews a stumblingblock, and unto the Greeks foolishness ; 24. but unto them

which are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God, and the wisdom of God.

In the Gospel history we see the Almighty and All-wise come into His own world to show us what love is, how to serve our brethren and die for them. We see a humble, suffering Person, and are told that here is our Lord and Master. Those are happy who accept the message, and recognise true goodness there. Alas for those blind eyes that seek for something grander, and pass over the Gospel with scorn!

25. Because the foolishness of God is wiser than men; and the weakness of God is stronger than men.

God has done what men could not do, He has opened heaven, taught religion to the simple, provided ways of holiness, and all this through Christ's Cross. No clever reasoners, no mighty monarchs could command peace to return to a sin-laden soul, but those who preach Christ's Cross can. How wonderfully feeble is human reason at its best in presence of life, and death, and sorrow! it has no key to the mystery, and can only grope in darkness. Thank God, we have a better guide!

26. For ye see your calling, brethren, how that not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called:

Then wisdom, and renown, and noble birth may hinder men's salvation. Indeed God may call such to be saved, but His message is best heard by those ears which are least taken up with the world's flattery. We are apt to go after great people, and try to judge of things as they do, but God warns us of the great danger of that plan.

27. But God hath chosen the foolish things of the world to confound the wise; and God hath chosen the weak things of the world to confound the things which are mighty; 28. and base things of the world, and things which are despised, hath God chosen, yea, and things which are not, to bring to nought things that are:

What a comfort all this is for the simple! God's choice and man's choice, God's opinion and man's opinion, God's way and man's way, are so absolutely different; He takes no reckoning of all that we poor mortals hold so precious. He takes an ignorant and simple soul, and plants in it rich gifts of love, and hope, and comfort that a duke might envy. Lord, bring us down to know our own nothingness, that so we may seek to be filled with Thy fulness.

29. That no flesh should glory in his presence.

Down, proud nature! all gifts are God's, and must be returned in thanks to Him. A strong body, a quick mind, abundant means,

kind friends, are all of Him, and will only do us harm without His grace. Much more do we owe to Him our Christian faith, our escapes from sin, our hope of heaven. He is all in all, I nothing, and less than nothing.

30. But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Without Him we are foolish, and guilty, and lifeless, and enslaved; no human arm can help us, but Jesus our Lord is all that we want. Let us enter day by day into the meaning of this verse; we are happy when we feel it true, when we gain gifts of wisdom, holiness, and freedom from our Lord each day. If we have found it so even a little, let us drink larger draughts from the same fountain.

31. That, according as it is written, He that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord.

Not in myself, O Lord, for I have nothing to glory of. Sick and foolish, ignorant and overburdened, trembling on the brink of death, I turn to Thy boundless wisdom, and cast myself on Thee with confidence. Thy goodness to me for so long, and in particular Thy love manifested on the Cross, encourage me to draw near. What seemed good in myself was nothing, and is soon gone, but Thy mercies fail not.

CHAPTER II.

He declareth that his preaching, 1. though it bring not excellency of speech, or of 4. human wisdom: yet consisteth in the 4, 5. power of God: and so far excelleth 6. the wisdom of this world, and 9. human sense, as that 14. the natural man cannot understand it.

AND I, brethren, when I came to you, came not with excellency of speech or of wisdom, declaring unto you the testimony of God.

I have a message to bring from God to your souls. I do not want to interest you with fine words, or amaze you with deep thoughts, but to tell you plainly what God has done to save you, and how you must live by virtue of His Divine gift. Such should be a Christian's spirit in declaring his Master's Word. He says, "Not my words or talents, but my God's great mercy in Christ is the attraction you should feel."

2. For I determined not to know any thing among you, save Jesus Christ, and him crucified.

This is the best knowledge, this makes us happy here and hereafter, this gives us light in darkness and comfort amidst pain. We can spare all other wisdom, but the story of God's Son dying on the Cross of shame to save us is still mighty to renew mankind. O Divine Teacher, grant me to meditate daily on Thy Life and Death, and so learn its lessons.

3. And I was with you in weakness, and in fear, and in much trembling.

What the great apostle, so gifted and so bold ! Yes, he had hours of depression, he felt blows and scoffs, he was weighed down by the sense of his enormous undertaking and the small means at his command, he longed for a season of rest and peace apart from the strife of tongues. Unless our Lord had come to him and encouraged him (Acts xviii. 9), he would have utterly fainted.

4. And my speech and my preaching was not with enticing words of man's wisdom, but in demonstration of the Spirit and of power : 5. that your faith should not stand in the wisdom of men, but in the power of God.

What was it, dear reader, that brought home God's Word to your own heart? You may have for a while been delighted with the poetry of religion, been attracted by fervent hymns, caught by subtle reasonings, but all this does not last. The soul wants to hear God's voice, and this in quietness and alone. We need to feel that there is a great Mercy near us, a great and holy Friend Who has been guiding us though we saw Him not. When this sense comes home to the heart eloquent words can add little.

6. Howbeit we speak wisdom among them that are perfect : yet not the wisdom of this world, nor of the princes of this world, that come to nought :

Religion has its own enlargement of mind ; those who walk by it may seem to lack this world's learning, but God gives them a right judgment in all things ; they have glimpses of His ways, they understand how He deals with mankind. Thank God, a believer, even if no great scholar, finds in the Bible or the Catechism a great store of wisdom, he reflects on all God's marvels taught there.

7. But we speak the wisdom of God in a mystery, even the hidden wisdom, which God ordained before the world unto our glory :

Before the world was God loved me, and determined to give me His own Son to be my ransom from sin, my strength in danger, my joy in heaven. His love is eternal ; all this world's history and treasures are nothing compared to God's gracious design for our salvation, that began before the world and will last on after it.

8. Which none of the princes of this world knew : for had they known it, they would not have crucified the Lord of glory.

O blinded eyes ! Divine Wisdom and Majesty appeared in His own world, and was not recognised. He came Who is, and Who gives, all power, and goodness, and knowledge, the Master of true hearts in all ages. But all that the world offered Him was scoffs and a cross. God keep me from the great misery of failing to recognise Jesus Christ. I desire to acknowledge Him and pay Him true worship.

9. But as it is written, Eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him.

The full meaning and effect of Christ's redeeming work, and the depths of peace and joy open to believers, and the glories of heaven to come, are all things too deep for us. Our narrow minds cannot contain such marvels, nor our poor words express them, yet love teaches us what they are. Love God, and He will show you ever fresh heights and depths of Divine grace.

10. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit : for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God.

11. For what man knoweth the things of a man, save the spirit of man which is in him ? even so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God.

Man's wisdom can teach earthly matters, show how to buy, and sell, and build, how to speak and reason, but we must apply to a heavenly Guide for instruction in Divine things. Let me be always a willing learner in the Holy Spirit's school. What are all this world's acquirements in comparison of lessons in faith, and love, and prayer ? Lord, in religion I am but a simple child ; that which I know not teach Thou me.

12. Now we have received, not the spirit of the world, but the spirit which is of God ; that we might know the things that are freely given to us of God.

Yes, Christ has not deserted us ; His Holy Spirit is with His Church, enlightens in the Scriptures, strengthens in Sacraments, comforts in prayer, it is all true.

" Seal but thine eye to pleasant sins,
Love's glorious world will on thee burst."

13. Which things also we speak, not in the words which man's wisdom teacheth, but which the Holy Ghost teacheth ; comparing spiritual things with spiritual.

When I have to speak of religion, let me do it in a fit manner, let

nothing of display, or bitterness, or levity hinder my message. Dear friend, what an honour the King of kings puts upon you, to carry tidings of His truth into some darkened heart! Prayer, and study, and patience, and love, are required for such a task.

14. But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned.

He laughs at God's promises, despises His judgments, finds no love in the Cross, no comfort in the Holy Table, the Bible puzzles him, the Church service wearies him, religion altogether appears to him unprofitable, and this is because he lives for this world only, and forgets that there is eternity behind. We know of many who are thus ignorant of God's ways, or know them only to scorn them. Lord, keep us from such a dark and sad condition.

15. But he that is spiritual judgeth all things, yet he himself is judged of no man.

This does not mean that a true Christian sets himself up above others, or refuses to submit to the Church or to those set over him. Far from that; he is modest and humble, and most unwilling to sit in judgment upon any. It means that he knows the true value of all things; he has compared the world's offers with God's, the world's pleasures, glories, comforts, teachings, with those of the Holy Spirit, and sees what the one and what the other are worth. He has the key of knowledge, because God guides him.

16. For who hath known the mind of the Lord, that he may instruct him? But we have the mind of Christ.

Lord, give me this Divine mind, that I may have a right judgment in all things. Let me constantly study my dear Master's words, pray for His Spirit, seek communion with Him, that my ignorance may be swallowed up in His heavenly wisdom. He came down the infinite descent from heaven to earth for my sake, so I would go up again with Him, that I may look down on things earthly.

CHAPTER III.

2. Milk is fit for children. 3. Strife and division, arguments of a fleshly mind. 7. He that planteth, and he that watereth, is nothing. 9. The ministers are God's fellowworkmen. 11. Christ the only foundation. 16. Men the temples of God, which 17. must be kept holy. 19. The wisdom of this world is foolishness with God.

AND I, brethren, could not speak unto you as unto spiritual. but as unto carnal, even as unto babes in Christ. 2. 1

have fed you with milk, and not with meat: for hitherto ye were not able to bear it, neither yet now are ye able.

Teach me, O Lord, by degrees as I can bear it, let me grow up in Thy love and knowledge as a child in his father's house. I cannot yet sacrifice to God my life and all I have; I cannot spend much time in thinking over Christ's love and the glories of heaven; I am but a child in religion, yet let me go forward. I desire to be pure and upright, to say my prayers, to keep on God's side. I trust Him to lead me on further into Divine truth.

3. For ye are yet carnal: for whereas there is among you envying, and strife, and divisions, are ye not carnal, and walk as men?

These Christians had been rescued from heathen ways and sins; they thought and spoke much of religion, and yet they used it to dispute over, to gain men's praise, to blame and judge others. All this made it of little profit to them; their prayers and communions were barren, they made no progress towards heaven. Such a temper keeps us back, it is a poor substitute for Gospel peace.

4. For while one saith, I am of Paul; and another, I am of Apollos; are ye not carnal?

Listen inwardly to God's teaching, and you will depend less on any preacher's gifts. What are they at their best in comparison with that Divine love which has sought you out and found you so mercifully? God has been pleased to send them and use their means to enlighten you, but take care not to forget the Master in the servant.

5. Who then is Paul, and who is Apollos, but ministers by whom ye believed, even as the Lord gave to every man?

God in His mercy chose such a preacher, such a writer, to touch my heart; I am grateful to them, but how much more to Him Who designed and fitted the speaker or writer for such a work! I recognise in them true tokens of that long-suffering mercy which has so patiently waited for my salvation.

6. I have planted, Apollos watered; but God gave the increase.

Our gardens represent our hearts; man must plant and water, but the hidden life which rises up in the plant and puts forth flowers and fruit, and that better life which fills the believer's heart and appears in love and holiness, are both beyond man's skill. Both nature and grace require an unseen hand to quicken them, do what we may.

7. So then neither is he that planteth any thing, neither he that watereth; but God that giveth the increase. 8. Now he that planteth and he that watereth are one: and every man shall receive his own reward according to his own labour.

We shall do nothing for God unless we have made our own the teaching of these two verses. All God's servants are nothing in themselves; all their power, wisdom, holiness, come of His constant, undeserved mercy; without Him they are helpless, and worse. Yet they are all His willing instruments, whom He employs for men's salvation, whom He richly helps and blesses, and will one day abundantly reward. Their own utter nothingness, and the rich mercy of their Lord and Master, are the two foundation-truths on which they depend.

9. For we are labourers together with God: ye are God's husbandry, ye are God's building.

It is God's field, how can I take the plants for mine? it is God's house, the stones of it belong to Him. I am but the servant of so great a Master, my honour and glory is to be engaged in His service; only let me remember He wants no idle hands, His garden or His house will be none the better for me unless I work hard.

10. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise masterbuilder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon.

This warning literally refers to teachers and to their doctrine, but it also has to do with my own soul. God has laid a foundation within me by holy Baptism, He has made me believe His truth and grow up in His fold. How have I been building on that foundation since? What foolish, wasted years, what selfishness and vanity, I have heaped up to hinder my Christian calling!

11. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

All must rest on this Foundation—the faith of the whole Church, and the life of each Christian, and the work that believers do for God. Begin with the true faith in Jesus Christ, God's only Son, our Lord, Who was crucified and rose again from the dead. Let His life, His words, His will be your rule, let nothing come between you and Him. What would become of us, if we were cut off from this Rock?

12. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble;

What shall I leave as my life's work? will any true hearts owe to me their conversion or their increase in grace? shall I have done something in my place to strengthen the force of good in the world? or shall I have made just a moment's stir, filled men's eyes with bustle and vanity for a few years, and then leave no trace behind? Gold, silver, and precious stones stand for tried Christian characters;

wood, hay, stubble, are those who think only of this world and give no thought to eternity. My life's work will have gone to multiply the one or the other.

13. Every man's work shall be made manifest : for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire ; and the fire shall try every man's work of what sort it is.

When the great fire of God's judgment rages, it will consume much which seemed eternal in man's eyes—great reputations, great fortunes, great eloquence, will all shrivel up in its blaze; but a humble believer need not fear, not a hair of his head shall be scorched. Keep me, O Lord, from vainglory, let my desire be to build for Thy honour, not my own, thus I shall offer no fuel to that scorching fire.

14. If any man's work abide which he hath built thereupon, he shall receive a reward.

That will be a reward worth having; God will abundantly recompense those who have taught and worked with an eye to His glory, and thus raised a noble building of many ransomed souls in which His Spirit dwells. That building will stand fast.

“ Many a blow and biting sculpture,
Polished well those stones elect.”

15. If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss : but he himself shall be saved ; yet so as by fire.

This man believed sincerely; he wished to work for God, and so he is not lost, but he leaves no teaching that can profit. His vanity, his follies, his ignorance, have spoilt God's work that he was meant to do. Let me often try my work and see if it has been well laid, or rather let me entreat God to lay it Himself. His Spirit must do in my own heart and in others' hearts what is beyond my strength.

16. Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you ?

God's temple! then Divine worship must be offered there, and sacrifice made in His honour, and all unclean things kept out, and all beautiful and costly treasures used for His glory. What a solemn dedication has been made of the soul! what care we should take to set up no idols there!

17. If any man defile the temple of God, him shall God destroy ; for the temple of God is holy, which temple ye are.

God keep me from profaning His temple by teaching what is false, or corrupting men by evil example. If men brought judgments on themselves by treating the literal temple or sacred vessels irrever-

ently, I shall fall into worse ruin if I spoil God's true temple in a Christian heart. We entreat Thee, Lord, keep holy those who have been made Thine in Baptism and Confirmation, let no enemy drive Thy gracious Presence away from them.

18. Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.

True wisdom is to believe what the world thinks impossible, to worship what it despises, love what it cares not for, despise what it loves and clings to. I long to be a fool after this pattern; no books can teach me this saving lesson so well as Christ's Cross; by considering that in prayer I can become a good scholar according to God's standard, and learn not to mind the world's contempt.

19. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness. 20. And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain.

When shall I find courage to stand up alone against man's judgment? How can I endure being called a fool? Nay, God is with me; if I keep from sin, love prayer, follow Christ's words, I shall be proved right one day. It will not matter in the least to me then that I have been laughed at by clever fellows here. Lord, Thy Word, Thy judgment, Thy love, Thy promises are sure. I will take these for my rule, and put away all else.

21. Therefore let no man glory in men. For all things are your's; 22. whether Paul, or Apollos, or Cephas, or the world, or life, or death, or things present, or things to come; all are your's;

All things are mine if I believe. Paul with his Divine wisdom, Apollos with his mighty preaching, Cephas with his courage and love, life with its rich opportunities, death with its unknown change, things present to bear, and things future to hope for, none of them can harm me, all are ordered by God for my salvation; they are means whereby His mercy comes to me, I must look up to Him through them.

23. And ye are Christ's; and Christ is God's.

This is the condition. All things belong to me if I belong to Christ, as He does to God. When I have learned this lesson of giving up self which my Christian calling pledges me to, then all turns to my use and profit. I will not blindly follow any mere man, still less my own misguided will, but will obey Jesus my Lord in all things, as He set Himself to do His Father's Will. If I am His, He will never lose me.

CHAPTER IV.

1. In what account the ministers ought to be had. 7. We have nothing which we have not received. 9. The apostles spectacles to the world, angels, and men, 13. the filth and offscouring of the world: 15. yet our fathers in Christ, 16. whom we ought to follow.

LE^T a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God.

I should honour in a priest not his gifts or talents, still less his worldly position, but his office as representing Christ and doing God's business. He is God's messenger to convey heavenly truths, sacramental grace, words of comfort, to my soul. How great is my Father's goodness, Who has chosen men to take charge of His treasures and carry them to those who need !

2. Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful.

Do not praise the clergy overmuch, nor blame them severely, still less set up one against another. What God requires of them is to be faithful in doing His work ; one has gifts, success, powers of preaching, which another lacks, but God is their Master, and knows which has used faithfully what was given him. In your own place too be faithful, and use God's gifts with the remembrance that your Master will send for you at the end of the day and ask for an account.

3. But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man's judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self.

Think of God's judgment, and this world's judgment seems nothing. If we keep that great day in mind we can afford to smile when men despise us, humble ourselves when they praise us, wait quietly to have justice done. This is the true secret of a quiet mind.

4. For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord.

Who can tell how oft he offendeth? My very faults escape me; certainly I cannot pass judgment upon others, for I know my own case very imperfectly. What can I do but commit myself into His hands Who is all-wise and yet most merciful? He made me, and therefore knows me as I am.

5. Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things of dark-

ness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.

Darkness hides both good and evil now, man praises or blames at his pleasure; but the true Light will discover all secrets, and the true Judge decide on every man's deserts. Lord, I am willing to wait patiently till that day for my own reward and for a true knowledge of others' hearts. If I expect such a day to come, I must keep my heart pure; how else will it bear such a flood of light thrown upon it?

6. And these things, brethren, I have in a figure transferred to myself and to Apollos for your sakes; that ye might learn in us not to think of men above that which is written, that no one of you be puffed up for one against another.

Away with party spirit! how hateful it is! When shall we learn this lesson which the apostle has been teaching, not to let men come between us and God, not to hate and despise other Christians, not to confine all goodness to those who exactly agree with us? Lord, Thy truth is so wide, Thy grace so bountiful, I will accustom myself to behold Thee teaching, working, comforting, by many instruments and in many places. All the greater glory be to Thee.

7. For who maketh thee to differ from another? and what hast thou that thou didst not receive? now if thou didst receive it, why dost thou glory, as if thou hadst not received it?

Down with conceit! Who gave you power of mind to learn, and opportunities of study? who provided watchful friends, and means of living and of getting on? Is the Bible, and the Faith, and the Sacraments of your own devising? Lord, it is all of Thee. I confess that Thy mercy only has enlightened, fed, guided, and saved me. I will tread under foot the shameful monster of pride which is always tickling my ears with sweet, flattering whispers.

8. Now ye are full, now ye are rich, ye have reigned as kings without us: and I would to God ye did reign, that we also might reign with you.

Sometimes all seems to prosper with me. I delight in religion, I see heavenly truth clearly, I guide and instruct my brethren. What a bright walk! what a happy prospect! Ah, I forget that I am in this world at all, with temptation near, with death to overcome. Summer is not here yet, many frosts, and storms, and disappointments have to come before the full sunshine of heaven.

9. For I think that God hath set forth us the apostles last, as it were appointed to death: for we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men.

Contrast the condition of Christian ministers now, their position, their comfort, their ease, with the shame and danger in which those missionaries of Christ lived who first taught the faith to our forefathers. They took their lives in their hands, they met with daily insults, and suffered a cruel death at last. Why are we so cowardly that a sharp word or unkind look is enough to frighten us from our duty? The apostles overcame a world in arms.

10. We are fools for Christ's sake, but ye are wise in Christ; we are weak, but ye are strong; ye are honourable, but we are despised.

True wisdom, true strength, true honour, are very different from what men call by these names. What will it matter at last, dear friend, if you appear foolish or are laughed at, if your life seems a failure, if you feel alone and desolate? Remember that the judgment of God and of His angels is extremely different from that judgment which man is so ready with.

11. Even unto this present hour we both hunger, and thirst, and are naked, and are buffeted, and have no certain dwelling-place; 12. and labour, working with our own hands: being reviled, we bless; being persecuted, we suffer it: 13. being defamed, we intreat: we are made as the filth of the world, and are the offscouring of all things unto this day.

Religion nowadays has a different aspect. Its ministers are highly placed, and often enjoy wealth and comfort. Perhaps this is one reason why they do not succeed in the work of conversion so well as the apostles did; yet even those who are in high place may find ways to humble themselves. Wait patiently on Christ's little ones, bear annoyances cheerfully, show courtesy to all, take care of the sick poor, welcome labour and trouble for your brethren, and you may thus share in the blessing which the apostle won by his heroic life. God does not call all Christians to lead such a life as that, but He warns all against the dangers of ease and honour. If God, seeing that you need it, pours some sharp remedy of pain or contempt into your life, ought you to complain?

14. I write not these things to shame you, but as my beloved sons I warn you. 15. For though ye have ten thousand instructors in Christ, yet have ye not many fathers: for in Christ Jesus I have begotten you through the gospel.

No tie could be like that; the Corinthians owed him their new birth in Christ. Without S. Paul's ministry they had remained in heathen darkness. God had chosen him to bring them into the true light. Where shall we find such spiritual fathers as this, who by

tenderness and zeal may dispose men to become God's children? We owe much thanks and love to those whose words have kindled the true faith in our hearts.

16. Wherefore I beseech you, be ye followers of me.

Not followers in the sense of taking a name or using a party cry, but in the sense of choosing a downright hard-working, sorrowing life in the place of one of worldly dignity and comfort. Follow S. Paul in striving against evil, in feeling for those who suffer, in laying aside luxuries, in putting Christ's Name and Kingdom first. He was a true man living amongst men, and yet Christ's servant always.

17. For this cause have I sent unto you Timotheus, who is my beloved son, and faithful in the Lord, who shall bring you into remembrance of my ways which be in Christ, as I teach every where in every church.

S. Paul's friends have long passed away from this earth; we cannot see him or them, but we can study his ways by observing what he did and taught. We have his life and letters with us still. He taught the one true catholic faith, he lived after his Master's pattern, his whole object was to plant this faith and example everywhere.

18. Now some are puffed up, as though I would not come to you. 19. But I will come to you shortly, if the Lord will, and will know, not the speech of them which are puffed up, but the power. 20. For the kingdom of God is not in word, but in power.

God wants workers, not discoursers; we may speak beautifully on religious subjects and yet show little of God's grace in our lives. S. Paul sought for evidence of the Christian life, he was not content to find mere warm feelings or fair words.

21. What will ye? shall I come unto you with a rod, or in love, and in the spirit of meekness?

Fathers, masters, teachers, remember God's judgment upon Eli. There are times when we must blame sharply, give grave warnings of danger. Is it charity to let our dear friends dream on in the road to ruin without warning them where they are? yet this too must be done in love and patiently.

CHAPTER V.

1. The incestuous person 6. is cause rather of shame unto them, than of rejoicing. 7. The old leaven is to be purged out. 10. Heinous offenders are to be shunned and avoided.

TIT is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife.

This was a Christian, one of S. Paul's disciples, who had come out of a heathen world and cast in his lot with Christ, and yet now he was living with his mother-in-law, whom he had induced to leave his father, and professing she was his wife. Even among Christians, as they were then, deadly sin could creep in, men's passions deceived and led them astray; how much more need have we to be on our guard now!

2. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you.

Mourning is required of us by the sin that abounds. Should we live on peacefully, and think only of enjoying the blessings of grace and nature—

" While souls are wandering far and wide,
And curses swarm on every side "?

3. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed.

Anger is right in this sense. Impurity, cruelty, avarice, dishonour done to parents, stir up a true and upright indignation. God's judgment is, and ours should therefore be, that such sins defile the soul and destroy a Christian's hope. God keep us from them, and enable us to condemn them firmly and plainly.

4. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, 5. to deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

What does this terrible sentence mean, and how did it work? The offender was cut off by a solemn sentence from the worship and society of Christians. God was no more his Father, nor the Church his mother; he had no share in the promises. Misery and ruin

would come upon him, evil spirits vex him. Yet all this was to make him repent; only thus, by this sharp treatment, could he be woken up to feel his own state.

6. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump?

Bad example spreads rapidly and secretly, as a little yeast alters all the dough. Vice, and evil words, and irreverence are catching; if you make friends with those who live thus, you will soon be like them. Take pains to live with those from whom you may learn good ways.

7. Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: 8. therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

Christians have come out of Egypt, the yoke is broken, the sacrifice offered, the Red Sea crossed; they have broken with the heathen ways, and must get rid of them utterly, as the Jews got rid of every trace of leaven out of their houses when the Passover came on. What am I? A newborn child of God, a member of His Son, an heir of everlasting life. Christ my Lord has died and risen again for me; away with all behaviour that disgraces such a calling as mine!

9. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: 10. yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world.

Paul did not bid us go out of the world, but he bade us fly from bad company. He knew that Christians must expect to hear of sin, to meet with ungodly men; they must take their part in the world's doings, and meet with much that is grievous in it. Yet still let them bear in their minds that they have a calling, a comfort, a hope of which worldly men know nothing.

11. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat.

Alas! now all these sins are met with among Christians, and little notice is taken of them. Let me, when I see a brother fall into deadly sin, grieve over his state, seek how to win him back, and be more humble as to my own condition. What am I that I should stand when so many have slipped? Lord, keep our dear

lads and girls who have been brought up as Thy children, let them not turn aside into such sins as these.

12. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? 13. But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person.

Christians at that time put away the offender, shut the church door against him, would not sit down to meals with him, or take him for a friend, until he repented and asked for pardon. Now all this is gone out of use, but the lesson of it remains to warn us of the great misery of deadly sin, and to bid us put away our own evil inclinations. There is an evil person within our own heart, who needs to be watched against, punished, and brought low. What pains we should take to get rid of him!

CHAPTER VI.

- 1. The Corinthians must not vex their brethren, in going to law with them: 6. especially under infidels. 9. The unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God. 15. Our bodies are the members of Christ, 19. and temples of the Holy Ghost. 16, 17. They must not therefore be defiled.*

DARE any of you, having a matter against another, go to law before the unjust, and not before the saints?

Christians were in fault then because they took their differences before a heathen judge, instead of settling them by arbitration amongst themselves. Christians are in fault now because they are so ready to quarrel, to blame, to complain, on account of some trifling injury. Going to law is not necessarily wrong, but peace, forbearance, and patience are certainly right.

2. Do ye not know that the saints shall judge the world? and if the world shall be judged by you, are ye unworthy to judge the smallest matters? 3. Know ye not that we shall judge angels? how much more things that pertain to this life?

The Kingdom of God shall come, all inequalities shall be set right. Those who have shared their Master's humility now shall share His glory then. Patience, dear friends; wickedness seems triumphant now, but a day shall come when—

"With speechless tongue and burning cheek,
The strong shall bow before the weak."

O wonderful reverse! can we not in the thought of it put up with a good deal of what seems hard and unjust? it is but for a while.

4. *If then ye have judgments of things pertaining to this life, set them to judge who are least esteemed in the church.*

This world's treasures are worth so little at their best, and pass away so soon, that they ought not to claim all our interest. God's Kingdom has its business, its prospects, its gains and losses, which are worthy of a good man's sympathy. Why are you so keen about a market or a race, and so little interested in missionary work, or checking drunkenness? You care for the chaff and leave the grain.

5. *I speak to your shame. Is it so, that there is not a wise man among you? no, not one that shall be able to judge between his brethren?* 6. *But brother goeth to law with brother, and that before the unbelievers.*

Christians are bound to take the Gospel as their rule, to follow Christ's pattern, to live in peace; if we applied these principles to our differences they would soon be settled. S. Paul said it was grievous for Christians, who are brethren in Christ, to appear against one another in court, and give the heathen ground for scoffing. This was contrary to the Church's spirit, and so, alas! is very much of my doings and sayings.

7. *Now therefore there is utterly a fault among you, because ye go to law one with another. Why do ye not rather take wrong? why do ye not rather suffer yourselves to be defrauded?* 8. *Nay, ye do wrong, and defraud, and that your brethren.*

Let those who are going to law consider these verses. The apostle does not absolutely forbid Christians to defend their rights, but he magnifies peace and depreciates exceedingly this world's gains and losses. If you have lost something, is it not often better to bear the loss rather than lose time, and money, and peace by legal proceedings? He bids us remember that it is a Christian's condition to bear and be patient; the real losers are those who oppress and defraud, they will soon find all their gains turn to ashes. Death will rob them before long of all that they gained.

9. *Know ye not that the unrighteous shall not inherit the kingdom of God? Be not deceived: neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, nor effeminate, nor abusers of themselves with mankind, 10. nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the kingdom of God.*

Deadly sin spoils our Christian calling, brings to nought all God's promises, and undoes the benefits of Christ's Death. Lord, let me take to heart this grave warning. I would fain keep myself from deadly sin, whether in thought, or word, or deed. I grieve that I

have sometimes forgotten Thy holy Law, and I desire earnestly to keep it now. What a poor exchange, to get the indulgence of lust, or covetousness, or evil temper now, but to lose God's Kingdom and all its glory !

11. And such were some of you : but ye are washed, but ye are sanctified, but ye are justified in the name of the Lord Jesus, and by the Spirit of our God.

We are members of Christ, children of God, heirs of heaven. Christ's Blood has an infinite power to wash out stains, the Holy Spirit an infinite gift of new life. We are not like brute beasts, fit only to struggle for prey and mate together at pleasure, but heirs of a Kingdom, souls whom God loves and for whom He has thrones and crowns. Devils or brutes might live on contentedly after their own passions, but believers are fit for something better.

12. All things are lawful unto me, but all things are not expedient : all things are lawful for me, but I will not be brought under the power of any.

Christian liberty bids me take care for others' infirmities, reminds me that I am bound not to give offence to my brethren ; and the same liberty bids me also keep my own heart free, lest by doing whatever I choose I become the slave of sin. How shall I spend my Sunday ? May I habitually use wine and spirits ? May I go freely to all places of amusement ? Let me answer these questions with the profit of other souls and the freedom of my own soul ever before my eyes. What if through my too great liberty any of God's children got into bondage ?

13. Meats for the belly, and the belly for meats : but God shall destroy both it and them. Now the body is not for fornication, but for the Lord ; and the Lord for the body.

Our bodies are sustained for a few years by our meat and drink, they grow strong, they reproduce their kind, they decay, then turn to dust ; but yet they belong to our Redeemer, He has made and consecrated them to be His. Their earthly uses will soon be over, but they are to be renewed and serve as the spirit's dwelling to all eternity. Our Lord claims us for His, He died to buy us back from sin.

14. And God hath both raised up the Lord, and will also raise up us by his own power.

He lives, He loves, He reigns in heaven. His sacred Body remains true and real, though never to die again, and the bodies of Christians have a like prospect. What, should I defile or disgrace that body which is one day to be raised up by God and called to a seat in heaven ?

15. Know ye not that your bodies are the members of Christ? shall I then take the members of Christ, and make them the members of an harlot? God forbid.

Body and soul we belong to Christ; in Baptism our bodies as well as our souls are purified and dedicated to be His; in Holy Communion they share in that food which is to preserve them to everlasting life. We must not rob Christ our Lord even of this poor body, for He counts it precious, bids us treat it with reverence, has had it signed with His Cross.

16. What? know ye not that he which is joined to an harlot is one body? for two, saith he, shall be one flesh. 17. But he that is joined unto the Lord is one spirit.

Jesus our Lord invites us to a holy union with Himself, full of pure love, earnest prayer, comfort and joy, a union begun here, and to be perfected hereafter. Shall I throw away all this for the vile pleasures of sin, which degrade both my soul and body, and fill me with shame and misery at last? Lord, let my love for Thee come first, and sanctify all other love.

18. Flee fornication. Every sin that a man doeth is without the body; but he that committeth fornication sinneth against his own body.

In this battle the best courage is to fly. Avoid occasions of sin, turn your thoughts elsewhere, fill your lonely hours with honest labour or pastime. Most other sins are best met by withstanding, this kind of sin by flying. The loss which such sins cause, and the evils they bring, are so great that a Christian should be on his guard against all that may lead to them. O Lord, make clean our hearts within us, and take not Thy Holy Spirit from us.

19. What? know ye not that your body is the temple of the Holy Ghost which is in you, which ye have of God, and ye are not your own?

Here is a holy temple, fearfully and wonderfully made, solemnly consecrated to be God's dwelling, meant for offering sacrifice, for reverence, and self-denial, and diligent work; God's Spirit dwells in it, Christ's Blood is poured out upon it, God's favour rests on it. This temple is the body of a Christian. Lord, keep this temple from those enemies that would break it down and profane it.

20. For ye are bought with a price: therefore glorify God in your body, and in your spirit, which are God's.

The devil's service is slavery indeed, but God's service is perfect freedom. Yes, I have a Master; I am not free to swear, to scoff, to drink, to sin. I glory in being under a law, I have business to

do for my Master, and I must set about it at once. Those who are under no master are only lost and wandering, they should beware lest the devil seize them again and make them slaves under cruel bondage.

CHAPTER VII.

2. He treateth of marriage, 4. shewing it to be a remedy against fornication : 10. and that the bond thereof ought not lightly to be dissolved. 18, 20. Every man must be content with his vocation. 25. Virginity wherefore to be embraced. 35. And for what respects we may either marry, or abstain from marrying.

NOW concerning the things whereof ye wrote unto me : *It is good for a man not to touch a woman.*

All men and women are not bound to seek married life. Those whom God has called to serve Him in an unmarried state may find pure joys, heavenly comfort, duty to be done with an undivided heart ; they need not envy a happy couple, for God Himself is their portion ; if they have chosen Him, He will not forsake them.

2. *Nevertheless, to avoid fornication, let every man have his own wife, and let every woman have her own husband.*

We live in the midst of temptations. God has ordained holy matrimony as a remedy against sin, as well as for mutual society, help, and comfort. Glory be to Him Who, knowing our weakness, has mercifully appointed a helpmeeet, whose presence reminds us of our duty, and tenderly recalls us from society that may do us harm ! Lord, set in the hearts of young men and women a reverence for each other ; let them be helped on their heavenward way, not hindered, by their mutual love.

3. *Let the husband render unto the wife due benevolence : and likewise also the wife unto the husband.* 4. *The wife hath not power of her own body, but the husband : and likewise also the husband hath not power of his own body, but the wife.* 5. *Defraud ye not one the other, except it be with consent for a time, that ye may give yourselves to fasting and prayer ; and come together again, that Satan tempt you not for your inconstancy.*

Lord, put into the hearts of married persons a resolve to be Thy servants ; let them live together in purity and love, let them not forget the times of fasting and prayer which are as needful for their souls as times of joy, let them pray together in their own room, and bring up their children to pray also. If all fathers and mothers hated

evil, loved prayer, were tender and patient towards each other, what lessons the children would learn and take away with them into the world ! Husband and wife are joined together in this sacred union of body and soul ; it is meant to lift them up to heaven, not to drag them down to earth.

6. *But I speak this by permission, and not of commandment.*
 7. *For I would that all men were even as I myself. But every man hath his proper gift of God, one after this manner, and another after that.*

Grace to live rightly in a single life is a gift of God. Grace to perform the duties of husband or of wife, to bring up children, to govern a household, is God's gift too. We should seek to find out what God's calling for us is, and ask Him to give us His blessing that we may live well in it. How can either single or married persons keep from harm and do good but by His gracious help ?

8. *I say therefore to the unmarried and widows, It is good for them if they abide even as I. 9. But if they cannot contain, let them marry : for it is better to marry than to burn.*

S. Paul found in the unmarried state freedom from earthly cares and liberty to serve God and preach His Word. He rejoiced himself to be thus free, and would have others share the same happiness. There are many who cannot follow him ; they are in danger, if they persevere in single life, either of some great downfall, or at least of levity and dissipation, or of leading a selfish, useless life ; their hearts need to be softened and purified by the cares and hopes that family life brings.

10. *And unto the married I command, yet not I, but the Lord, Let not the wife depart from her husband : 11. but and if she depart, let her remain unmarried, or be reconciled to her husband : and let not the husband put away his wife.*

The words of Christ are laws for His people, it is He Who has declared this union to be so binding. There is so great a power in it to exalt and sanctify, or, alas ! to ruin souls. Let husband and wife be patient and forbearing with each other, let them excuse each other's infirmities and strive always for peace. If we have an enemy by our own fireside, where are we to find a friend ?

12. *But to the rest speak I, not the Lord : If any brother hath a wife that believeth not, and she be pleased to dwell with him, let him not put her away. 13. And the woman which hath an husband that believeth not, and if he be pleased to dwell with her, let her not leave him.*

When a husband or a wife believed the Gospel, but their partner remained a heathen, what was a Christian's duty in such a case ?

Ought the marriage bond to be dissolved? S. Paul says no, he bids the Christian husband or wife live on in peace, he hopes that good example and patient kindness may at last win our dear ones to find the same Saviour Whom we have ourselves found.

14. *For the unbelieving husband is sanctified by the wife, and the unbelieving wife is sanctified by the husband: else were your children unclean; but now are they holy.*

If the father or mother belongs to God's people, then they will regard the children too as His, they will not let them go after the deadly temptations of the heathen world, they will bring them to Holy Baptism, have them blessed in His Name and signed with His Cross. How much we owe to our parents for bringing us into God's fold, and teaching us His way!

15. *But if the unbelieving depart, let him depart. A brother or a sister is not under bondage in such cases: but God hath called us to peace.*

This does not allow Christians to separate from each other, but sets a Christian free who had been married while yet a heathen, and whose partner, still remaining in unbelief, insisted on a separation. The apostle's word is "Peace," peace for his converts in their married life if it may be, otherwise peace apart from it; but in no case let the believer forsake God, Who has called him or her out of darkness into His marvellous light. Some persons have had to give up much, or go through much, when they became Christians.

16. *For what knowest thou, O wife, whether thou shalt save thy husband? or how knowest thou, O man, whether thou shalt save thy wife?*

We must leave that to God, only let us not throw away our own salvation. Let not a wife think that by giving up her own devotions she will influence her husband more to God, let not a husband think that by allowing foolish extravagance or disorder at home he will gain his wife's ear to his advice. God has made us responsible for our conduct, and bids us walk in the straight road, even though the soul that we love best may turn aside from it.

17. *But as God hath distributed to every man, as the Lord hath called every one, so let him walk. And so ordain I in all churches.*

Faith does not interfere with our earthly condition. God's true lovers may be found in any business, in any dress, in any place. They are rich or poor, married or single, learned or simple, as the case may be, but they are alike in heart; they have heard God's call and welcomed it; they walk towards heaven, led by the Good

Shepherd; they bear about within them a treasure of hope and faith. Lord, whatever be my lot in life, let me be one of those who obey Thy gracious voice that speaks within.

18. Is any man called being circumcised? let him not become uncircumcised. Is any called in uncircumcision? let him not be circumcised.

Jews might observe their own customs, and yet keep Christ's law too. Gentiles might remain in their freedom, and yet be Christians. The apostle aimed at bringing about an inward change, a true circumcision of the heart, which would make the outward sign appear of no importance. Whether people were Jews or Gentiles mattered little now, the Gospel made both one.

19. Circumcision is nothing, and uncircumcision is nothing, but the keeping of the commandments of God.

In like manner married or unmarried life, a good place in the world or a bare subsistence, luck in all we undertake or persistent failure, a happy, peaceful temper or a sad, perplexed one,—all these are nothing, soon over, and not much affecting our salvation; the one important thing is, wherever and whatever we are, to do our Father's Will.

20. Let every man abide in the same calling wherein he was called.

I am not contented where I am, why cannot I have more comforts, succeed better, be more appreciated? Oh for some change which would improve my condition! surely I have more burdens to bear than any one else. Not so, dear friend, the fault is perhaps in yourself; if you can serve God where you are, do not change rashly or be restless. God's Spirit persuades to peace and quietness. He bids us make a good trial, nor move unless His Will is very clearly shown.

21. Art thou called being a servant? care not for it: but if thou mayest be made free, use it rather.

Servants were mostly slaves in S. Paul's day, often cruelly used, or bought and sold. What a heavenly gift to them was the message of the Gospel, which told how God's Son came down to set men free. The apostle says to them, "Be content, your being slaves does not matter now. God has freed your heart, His tender love and glorious promises do away with your burden."

22. For he that is called in the Lord, being a servant, is the Lord's freeman: likewise also he that is called, being free, is Christ's servant.

Masters are servants to Christ; they are subject to His law, and must

obey and give account to Him. Servants are free men in Christ. He has knocked off the chains of sin, set them free inwardly, taken them to be God's dear children. Let all remember this: if our place in life is to give orders, let us do so humbly, as having a Master over us; if we have to serve, which is sometimes the more blessed lot, let us do so cheerfully and in love, for we have freedom now to do our duty.

23. Ye are bought with a price; be not ye the servants of men.

Behold your true Master! Jesus the Lord has bought you with His precious Blood, no one else can have such right over you. O my God, let me remember this truth when I am tempted to sin. What are men's threats or persuasions to me? I belong body and soul to my Redeemer.

24. Brethren, let every man, wherein he is called, therein abide with God.

But was not the Gospel a great reforming power? Has it not changed the face of society? Yes, but it worked from within, transforming masters and slaves till the relations of slavery passed away, improving laws by improving hearts, bearing injustice and so overcoming it. This is the most lasting method; this kind of revolution is the best one.

25. Now concerning virgins I have no commandment of the Lord: yet I give my judgment, as one that hath obtained mercy of the Lord to be faithful. 26. I suppose therefore that this is good for the present distress, I say, that it is good for a man so to be.

This was the question, Should Christian parents settle their daughters in the married state? and the apostle answers that the trouble and distress which prevailed over the world at that time was a great reason for their daughters remaining unmarried, and in general for a single life being wisest. He bids us in the choice of a condition seek not our own will but God's, and then rest quietly upon Him.

27. Art thou bound unto a wife? seek not to be loosed. Art thou loosed from a wife? seek not a wife. 28. But and if thou marry, thou hast not sinned; and if a virgin marry, she hath not sinned. Nevertheless such shall have trouble in the flesh: but I spare you.

When a couple marry, all seems bright to them, nothing but rejoicing then; afterwards come many trials, many sorrows, which do not beset a single life; yet if God calls you to be married, He will sanctify these troubles to you, and make your home a dwelling of peace. He will bring up there citizens of His heavenly city.

29. But this I say, brethren, the time is short: it remaineth, that both they that have wives be as though they had none;

Lord, print in my heart this warning, "Time is short."

" Brief life is here our portion,
Brief sorrow, short-lived care."

A little time to do good, to fight against sin, to pray, to love, then I and my works shall have passed into the great hereafter, and this world will know me no more. Even my dear home and its holy affections belong to a perishing world.

30. And they that weep, as though they wept not; and they that rejoice, as though they rejoiced not; and they that buy, as though they possessed not;

My tears should have a thought of comfort: God is good, heaven will wipe all tears away. My laughter should be subdued by the remembrance of temptation and of death. My prosperity is but lent me by God to use well for a few years, He will require an account of it. My God, in sorrow or in joy, in wealth or in poverty, let me keep a quiet mind, and remember my last end.

31. And they that use this world, as not abusing it: for the fashion of this world passeth away.

Use this world, but do not let it be your master. God has set us here to do our work and fill our place, and yet our true home is not here. How soon all the glory and the brightness of life, all pleasant hours, kind friends, successes and failures, tears and smiles alike, will have passed away! Lord, is this a world worth spending all my heart upon? I will look back, and look round, and so look up to Thee. Thou art my sure abiding-place.

32. But I would have you without carefulness. He that is unmarried careth for the things that belong to the Lord, how he may please the Lord: 33. but he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

This is the danger. A Christian man's prayers, his communions, his alms, his good works for others, may be hindered by the cares of a household. Has he not wife, and children, and business, and property, to take up all his time? Ah, but there is a way too of pleasing God by making our daily cares a daily exercise of patience. Unselfish love will learn to love God more through a right use of earthly love, otherwise that love will do us harm, not good.

34. There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is

married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

A wife may take warning from this verse. Let her be careful for God's service as well as for her home duties; one of her dangers is lest this world and its pressing calls should come between her and God. Dear Lord, help those of us who are married to care for Thy house, Thy altar, and Thy poor, keep our bodies and hearts Thine, and so lead our dear ones to love Thee too. Only God's Spirit can teach us how to reconcile these two calls, God's service and the duties of our condition.

35. *And this I speak for your own profit; not that I may cast a snare upon you, but for that which is comely, and that ye may attend upon the Lord without distraction.*

We must find room for Mary's part. Remember how the Lord Jesus approved that and called it good. If we are at times careful and troubled as Martha was, how welcome should opportunities of prayer be, how we should value our times for reading God's Word, still more for coming to His Table! Those whose path in life is lonely have the great privilege of freer communion with Him.

36. *But if any man think that he behaveth himself uncomely toward his virgin, if she pass the flower of her age, and need so require, let him do what he will, he sinneth not: let them marry.* 37. *Nevertheless he that standeth stedfast in his heart, having no necessity, but hath power over his own will, and hath so decreed in his heart that he will keep his virgin, doeth well.*

Christian parents are bidden to dispose of their children's future in this spirit. They are to put aside thoughts of gain or worldly position, and consider simply how their dear daughter can serve God best. Either she should have a Christian home and duties there, and this not determined on hastily or in mere fancy, or else she should have learned to devote herself wholly to God and to good works.

38. *So then he that giveth her in marriage doeth well; but he that giveth her not in marriage doeth better.*

Married life is holy, instituted by God, blessed by Christ, and the means of training souls for God's heavenly Kingdom. Those are happy who use it rightly. Single life too has its own great blessings, being after the pattern of Christ and of many saints, giving opportunity for freer devotion and fuller service. O Lord, guide the hearts of parents and children that they may choose a state of life prayerfully and wisely.

39. *The wife is bound by the law as long as her husband*

liveth; but if her husband be dead, she is at liberty to be married to whom she will; only in the Lord.

These words "only in the Lord" are a guide to those intending to marry; they forbid entering into marriage only to please our fancy, or to increase our means, or for any object of this world; they forbid marriage with those who do not believe in God or worship Him; they check our liberty by a holy rule. How wretched is a union where God has been forgotten! all else may be richly provided, but who can give a blessing if His grace be absent?

40. *But she is happier if she so abide, after my judgment: and I think also that I have the Spirit of God.*

S. Paul thought of all the good works that Christian widows might do, of their duties to their own families, of their attending God's house, of their care for Christ's suffering members. He thought what a peaceful, holy, patient, and quiet life they might live. When Providence has set us more free from earth, this is in mercy, and to enable us to prepare for heaven.

CHAPTER VIII.

1. *To abstain from meats offered to idols. 8, 9. We must not abuse our Christian liberty, to the offence of our brethren: 11. but must bridle our knowledge with charity.*

NOw as touching things offered unto idols, we know that we all have knowledge. Knowledge puffeth up, but charity edifieth.

What is knowledge without love? Knowledge only fills the head and directs the hands, but love quickens the heart. It is right to know any good learning that comes in our way, but to know one's own self and to know God is the best knowledge of all. Lord, give me this wholesome knowledge, and keep me from a shallow, conceited temper. How foolish, weak, and ignorant am I in Thy sight!

2. *And if any man think that he knoweth any thing, he knoweth nothing yet as he ought to know.*

Remember that all our knowledge in this life comes to very little. Eternity will show us truths of which we have a very faint glimmering here. What folly it is to lord it over others, to boast of our knowledge and seek praise from them for it! Let me but know my duty and the Christian faith, I will be contented to wait for fuller light till hereafter.

3. *But if any man love God, the same is known of him.*

Let me, O Lord, know and love Thee, Who knowest me as I am. This can only come of Thy gift, and it will be my truest happiness. Without this knowledge of God's excellence and our Saviour's love, how barren is this world, how sad and dreary our end! Simple persons can profit in this study, they can grasp every day more of God's mysteries; He leads them on and gives them light.

4. As concerning therefore the eating of those things that are offered in sacrifice unto idols, we know that an idol is nothing in the world, and that there is none other God but one.

False gods are indeed rubbish and fancy, they can neither help nor hurt; meat that had been offered in their temples is the same as any other meat, all comes from God and belongs to Him; yet we sometimes raise idols of our own vanity or evil desires, and sacrifice to them, and so steal from God. Sometimes Christians in church appear to be adoring the true God, but yet have their eyes or hearts wholly bent on some object of this earth.

5. For though there be that are called gods, whether in heaven or in earth, (as there be gods many, and lords many,) 6. but to us there is but one God, the Father, of whom are all things, and we in him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him.

What glorious freedom faith gives! it removes all other objects of worship, and bids us fear and love God only. Why should we fear overmuch this world's terrors, or be enticed with its beauties? There is one Almighty Father, Who made us for Himself and loves us dearly; one Lord and Redeemer, Who came down to die for us, and renew our nature. This is true freedom for creatures, to have a fit Master; the world and its vanities are unworthy of our service, but our Father in heaven, our crucified and risen Saviour, are always near and true. What a wretched thing it would be to have lost the false gods and yet not find the true One!

7. Howbeit there is not in every man that knowledge: for some with conscience of the idol unto this hour eat it as a thing offered unto an idol; and their conscience being weak is defiled.

These were weak brethren; they might have known that the idol was nothing, and therefore the meat that had been offered to it was just as good as any other meat; but they still felt a fear and horror of the idol, and thought that men became its servants by eating what had been offered to it. S. Paul bids his wiser friends think of the case of such fearful doubting believers and take care not to lead them into sin. Tender consciences require tender treatment from us.

8. But meat commendeth us not to God: for neither, if we eat, are we the better; neither, if we eat not, are we the worse.

What we eat or drink is in itself quite indifferent. Whether we come to the Holy Table fasting or after taking other food, whether we are in the habit of taking wine or beer with our meals or not, whether we partake of this or that dish or leave it alone,—all this does not affect our condition in God's sight. Charity, unselfishness, consideration for others, thankfulness to God,—these sanctify our use of His gifts.

9. But take heed lest by any means this liberty of yours become a stumblingblock to them that are weak.

How careful S. Paul is for the weak! Let us consider this verse as a guide to our behaviour in church. Do not offend those with whom you worship by doing anything that may encourage them in superstition, nor again in irreverence. We learn also how we should spend our Sundays, not merely that we are free to do as we please on that day, but that we must not lead others by our practice to think the Lord's day is nothing.

10. For if any man see thee which hast knowledge sit at meat in the idol's temple, shall not the conscience of him which is weak be emboldened to eat those things which are offered to idols; 11. and through thy knowledge shall the weak brother perish, for whom Christ died?

The weak Christian might fall away and become a worshipper of idols through seeing one who was more clear-sighted freely enjoying something that had been offered to an idol, thus Christ would lose this dear soul whom He died to save. What reverence, modesty, patience, ought we not to show in dealing with our brethren! They and we are God's children, ransomed souls, fellow-travellers towards heaven. A hasty word, a mocking laugh, an unkind action, may drive some one away from the right side never to return.

12. But when ye sin so against the brethren, and wound their weak conscience, ye sin against Christ.

It is unkind to offend or give pain needlessly, cruel to hurt the weak, impious to strike at Christ our Lord. Bear this in mind if you have to do with the ignorant or with children; do not let them think you indifferent to sin or irreverent, better to restrain your wonted freedom than upset the devotion of those who are serving God in simplicity.

13. Wherefore, if meat make my brother to offend, I will eat no flesh while the world standeth, lest I make my brother to offend.

Sometimes this rule applies to drink as well as food; no doubt we are all free to use moderately such things as beer or spirits, yet occasions may come when it is better to give up this liberty of ours

for the sake of those many whom the use of stimulants leads into ruin. It is a happy chance to be able to do good to any one, or encourage them in resisting temptation. Thank God for putting in our way such opportunities of helping our brethren.

CHAPTER IX.

1. *He sheweth his liberty, 7. and that the minister ought to live by the gospel: 15. yet that himself hath of his own accord abstained, 18. to be either chargeable unto them, 22. or offensive unto any, in matters indifferent. 24. Our life is like unto a race.*

AM I not an apostle? am I not free? have I not seen Jesus Christ our Lord? are not ye my work in the Lord? 2. If I be not an apostle unto others, yet doubtless I am to you: for the seal of mine apostleship are ye in the Lord.

What power, what dignity, what knowledge the apostle had! what glorious consequences followed on his preaching! and yet he was willing to lay all that aside and put himself on the level of the humblest believer. He never used his position to excuse himself from any trouble or humiliation. God teach us this same lesson. Because he was the apostle, so much the more reason, he thought, for waiting on others.

3. *Mine answer to them that do examine me is this, 4. Have we not power to eat and to drink? 5. have we not power to lead about a sister, a wife, as well as other apostles, and as the brethren of the Lord, and Cephas?*

This is the question of rights and duties. S. Paul had the right to maintenance, and to support a wife and family; his flock were bound to supply his needs, but he felt it his duty to forbear all this. He sought only souls, he loved to find any occasion of self-sacrifice. Think always more about your duties than your rights, and then God will deal with you on the same principle. Where should we be if Divine justice claimed all its rights from us?

6. *Or I only and Barnabas, have not we power to forbear working? 7. Who goeth a warfare any time at his own charges? who planteth a vineyard, and eateth not of the fruit thereof? or who feedeth a flock, and eateth not of the milk of the flock?*

Christ's minister is then a soldier who has to march and fight, a vine-dresser who has to dig, and plant, and gather in under the hot sun, a shepherd who has to care for his sheep in storm and darkness.

What shall we think of those ministers who would enjoy the rewards and not share the labour? Lord, waken up pastors' hearts that they may try themselves by this rule.

8. Say I these things as a man? or saith not the law the same also? 9. for it is written in the law of Moses, Thou shalt not muzzle the mouth of the ox that treadeth out the corn. Doth God take care for oxen?

This does not mean to deny God's merciful care for all His creatures, nor indeed the humanity of Moses' law in making this rule that the ox which trod out the corn should be allowed a share of it. God would have us use tenderly and kindly all our dumb brethren that He has made to serve us; only S. Paul seizes on the precept to show that it had a further spiritual meaning which he is in search of here.

10. Or saith he it altogether for our sakes? For our sakes, no doubt, this is written: that he that ploweth should plow in hope; and that he that thresheth in hope should be partaker of his hope.

The rule meant, labourers should share, and applied to workers in the spiritual harvest as well as to the poor toiling oxen. Should not, then, all work for God be done in earnest, pains taken about it? Those who preach or visit, those who sing in a choir, teach a class, administer charities, should remember that the Great Master desires no lazy hands about His business; if God's work is worth doing, let us put our hearts into it.

11. If we have sown unto you spiritual things, is it a great thing if we shall reap your carnal things?

This spiritual seed is—

“The wondrous growth unseen,
The hopes that soothe, the fears that brace,
The love that shines serene.”

What a glorious crop that is! Lord, thanks be to Thee for sowing the holy seed in our hearts; grant that it may spring up and bear fruit abundantly, and let us in our turn be liberal to others. What mercies both for soul and body God has bestowed on us! and He bids us give freely as we have received.

12. If others be partakers of this power over you, are not we rather? Nevertheless we have not used this power; but suffer all things, lest we should hinder the gospel of Christ.

How careful we should be not to hinder Christ's Gospel in *any* way! our life should be so ordered that even unreasonable people should not be able to make of us an argument against the faith. S. Paul determined his hands should be clean, no one should be able to

make out that he got any profit by his preaching. His first object was to behave in all ways as Christ's faithful soldier. What might win hearts best, that was his way.

13. Do ye not know that they which minister about holy things live of the things of the temple? and they which wait at the altar are partakers with the altar? 14. Even so hath the Lord ordained that they which preach the gospel should live of the gospel.

God's ministers in the old law were supported by the sacrifices and offerings of His people, so He has appointed it to be under the new law. Still, they must do His work if they would receive His allowance. Old Testament priests who neglected to sacrifice and offer, ministers of the Gospel who neglect to teach God's Holy Word, have no right to enjoy this provision. Lord, are there no drones in Thy hive, who are fed there, but do no work for Thee?

15. But I have used none of these things: neither have I written these things, that it should be so done unto me: for it were better for me to die, than that any man should make my glorying void.

This ambition was a harmless one, not like that of many ; the apostle did not glory in being honoured or rewarded, but in getting nothing for his work. He could not part with his poverty; it was so dear and delightful that he could not leave it for all that bountiful hearts might offer him. Which of us is content and happy in poor estate, nay, even rejoicing to serve God without reward ?

16. For though I preach the gospel, I have nothing to glory of: for necessity is laid upon me; yea, woe is unto me, if I preach not the gospel!

Lord, thunder in the ears of pastors this warning, "Woe unto thee, if thou preach not the Gospel!" Let them regard themselves as Thy servants set to do Thy work, and about to incur Thy endless wrath if they neglect it. Lay upon us all the sweet necessity of believing and obeying, as on them of preaching. Woe unto us also if we believe not so gracious a message !

17. For if I do this thing willingly, I have a reward: but if against my will, a dispensation of the gospel is committed unto me. 18. What is my reward then? Verily that, when I preach the gospel, I may make the gospel of Christ without charge, that I abuse not my power in the gospel.

Love finds this way of reward, to get none here below. Love rejoices to do kindnesses, to win souls, to teach and help others, and get

nothing for it, perhaps no praise or thanks even. Consider what a treasure God is preparing for those whose labours in His cause have found no gratitude on earth ; it was their delight to stand above all pay, and do all the good they did just for love's sake.

19. For though I be free from all men, yet have I made myself servant unto all, that I might gain the more.

Christ our Lord laid aside His glory and lived here as a servant, this it was that moved the saints to choose the same condition. I am but a servant to Him and to my brethren ; all my comfort therefore, my credit, my time, my ease, is at His disposal and theirs. So long as His Name is praised, the less I am heard of the better. I am bound to bear with all and to feel as they feel, for the Lord has set me to wait on them and do their errands.

20. And unto the Jews I became as a Jew, that I might gain the Jews ; to them that are under the law, as under the law, that I might gain them that are under the law ;

He was willing to comply with Jewish customs, would join in their services, make offerings with them, keep their vows, do all to show that he honoured their ancient law and was one in prayer and faith with them. Thus they would be led on to inquire about Paul's Master, Who came to fulfil the law and the prophets ; the apostle's gracious sympathy drew them after him.

21. To them that are without law, as without law, (being not without law to God, but under the law to Christ,) that I might gain them that are without law.

With Gentiles he was content to live as they did, and so make friends with them. What a happy changeableness ! it did not proceed from a fickle temper, but from a firm, deep-rooted purpose. So long as Paul could advance his neighbour's salvation he was ready to do or leave undone, take or go without ; all treatment was the same to him. All his looked-for gain was souls converted to Christ.

22. To the weak became I as weak, that I might gain the weak : I am made all things to all men, that I might by all means save some.

Consider the weak most of all, teach them in simplicity, bear with their scruples, avoid giving them offence ; they also are precious souls made by God and redeemed by Christ. If it is but a boy's heart won to good, but a simple fellow kept from drink, but a poor household set at peace again, but an ignorant girl taught to pray, it is all worth doing, and God will accept it willingly. Gracious Lord, let me save some souls ; keep me, above all, from causing any to be lost.

23. And this I do for the gospel's sake, that I might be partaker thereof with you.

Not worth while? What greater and purer pleasure in this world than to see friends won to God? His ways are ways of pleasantness even here; and then hereafter to share in that happiness which God gives to His faithful servants. How men toil and slave for the sake of a little honour or even amusement! Do not grace and glory demand some exertion on our part?

24. Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain.

Running a race means hard work and breathless efforts to get ahead; those who do not run their best miss the prize. Lord, put into my heart an earnest desire to excel; let me, in prayer and good works, in avoiding sin, in studying Thy Word, stir up my slothful nature to exertion. What! is God's work the only thing to be idled over, do we expect to saunter into heaven?

25. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible.

"Training" implies much self-denial, much perseverance. Those who are going to race agree to give up many pleasures and put up with many hardships. They are amply rewarded if they win the race. So God bids us rule our life by His Word, give up mere luxuries, be sober and regular in our ways, not for the body's sake alone, but to obey Him and help our brethren. If men deny themselves, take great pains, and persevere long, to get their bodies into perfect fitness for a race, what pains should not Christians take to adorn and perfect God's image within them, which will shine brightly when the poor body decays!

26. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: 27. but I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway.

A true race where runners win or lose, a real fight where I shall be knocked down and overcome if I do not lay low my enemy, an eternal state of gain or loss depending on my conduct here,—such, O Lord, are my circumstances. Grant me to see where I am and to behave suitably. Why should I complain if I am out of breath with the race or bruised in the fight? When I come to my Father's house there will be rest and peace enough; only, O Lord, do Thou bring me there, no efforts of my own will suffice.

CHAPTER X.

1. The sacraments of the Jews 6. are types of our's, 7. and their punishments, II. examples for us. 14. We must fly from idolatry. 21. We must not make the Lord's table the table of devils: 24. and in things indifferent we must have regard of our brethren.

MOREOVER, brethren, I would not that ye should be ignorant, how that all our fathers were under the cloud, and all passed through the sea; 2. and were all baptized unto Moses in the cloud and in the sea;

We have been baptized, and so made God's children. He has entered into covenant with us, made us inheritors of the kingdom of heaven. So the Israelites in old time had their privileges: the cloudy pillar represented God's covenanted presence; the Red Sea washed away their enemies and separated them from their old bondage; in the Exodus they became God's chosen people, set apart to be His. Thanks be to God for the greater deliverance, more thorough cleansing, better promises, which believers now enjoy.

3. And did all eat the same spiritual meat; 4. and did all drink the same spiritual drink: for they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them: and that Rock was Christ.

We have heavenly food offered to us at God's altar to strengthen and refresh our souls, so they ate the manna and drank the water that flowed from the rock. God provided for them food and drink during their journey by His power and mercy. It is that same Lord that has provided for us heavenly bread to nourish all that is good in us, and a living stream to wash away all stains. We should be fools if we neglected to use these life-giving means which redeeming love offers us.

5. But with many of them God was not well pleased: for they were overthrown in the wilderness.

Many baptized Christians, few who keep their promises; many communicants at the Lord's Table, few who show His grace in their lives. Such is our history too; around us lies the wilderness, and we are in great danger of missing the way. Lord, pardon our profane, ungrateful hearts; make us use Thy mercies to our souls' profit; bring us at last into the heavenly Canaan, where we shall see Thy face and be at home with Thee.

6. Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted.

The blessings, warnings, promises of the old covenant are figures of what passes in the Christian Church and in the life of each believer. God shows us in Exodus and Numbers a picture of our own condition. We are passing through the desert towards our heavenly home, the mercies and privileges we have much resemble those of Israel, our dangers too are like theirs. God grant that their sad downfalls may not find a like fulfilment in us.

7. Neither be ye idolaters, as were some of them; as it is written, The people sat down to eat and drink, and rose up to play.

Idolatry was one sin into which the Israelites fell; they called a golden calf their god, and held a grand feast in its honour. Not a few Christians worship money, they live only to gain it; others worship their own pleasure, they live to amuse and enjoy themselves: these have stolen away their hearts from God, and set them on some poor object of this earth.

8. Neither let us commit fornication, as some of them committed, and fell in one day three and twenty thousand.

Impurity was another sin. The people committed whoredom with the daughters of Moab, and so brought destruction on themselves. Deadly sins do not nowadays incur outward death as an immediate punishment, but they ruin soul and body too at last. We should have feared if we had seen sinners cut off by a sudden judgment; is there nothing to fear in the miserable memories of sin, the foulness of heart, the coldness towards God that sins of impurity bring with them now?

9. Neither let us tempt Christ, as some of them also tempted, and were destroyed of serpents.

Unbelief was a third sin; they said, "Is God among us or not?" they forgot that loving mercy which had borne with them all those years, and was now about to set them in the promised land. All they felt was the fatigue and heat of the journey, and the length of time that passed before they came in sight of home. Lord, keep us from those serpents of unbelief which sting many a young heart and kill its faith. There are poisonous books and poisonous teachers about who try to destroy all that Thy love has done for us.

10. Neither murmur ye, as some of them also murmured, and were destroyed of the destroyer.

Disobedience was a fourth sin; they murmured against Moses, whom God had set over them. Lord, keep us in submission to those whom Thy Providence has placed over us. A dutiful heart is a great treasure, a heart that desires loyally to obey, and fulfils all duties as appointed by God readily, cheerfully, and thoroughly. A discontented person is sure to have a wretched life.

11. Now all these things happened unto them for ensamples : and they are written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come.

Scripture is written for our learning. What was done in figure long ago is fulfilled in our own day. For us it was that God stored up so many mercies and judgments in His Holy Word. He bids us read the Old Testament, not as a mere history only, but as a record of redeeming grace striving to overcome man's errors and follies. In Jacob, in David, in Solomon, in the kings and people of the Old Testament, we can behold ourselves, our trials, our temptations.

12. Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall.

This is a golden verse. If you are now, dear friend, pure and upright, if you love religion, if your character is good, if you are at peace within, then thank God for all these benefits, and keep watch and pray daily lest you lose them. You are passing through a wilderness, how easy to lose the path or be ensnared by sin ! What deadly downfalls have happened to easy-going people !

13. There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man : but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able ; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that ye may be able to bear it.

Lord, keep these thoughts in the hearts of Thy servants when they leave home and start for themselves in the great world. Temptation is not irresistible, it is but a little noise, a little stir, a slight impulse ; others have overcome such victoriously. Again, God is not forgetful ; He watches over us, He desires us to conquer, He appoints these trials for our good. Once more, the way is not closed up, there is no constraint on us to sin, we are free to keep away from the evil and withhold our consent.

14. Wherefore, my dearly beloved, flee from idolatry.

Idolatry is of many sorts. Those Christians fall into idolatry who set their whole happiness in the love of any creature, or who let themselves be carried away by careless friends and enjoyments to forget their duty to God. Give us, O Lord, grace and strength to flee from danger ; we are thy servants, and will not let the world or the flesh rule over us.

15. I speak as to wise men ; judge ye what I say.

S. Paul is about to speak of Holy Communion as pledging us to oneness with God and abhorrence of idols, and he says, " You all are familiar with this, you all join in this, therefore you understand what I mean." Many believers nowadays are quite unfamiliar with

that holy rite, they never come there, and therefore cannot judge of the mysteries and blessings that are hidden in it. Would not this have surprised the apostle?

16. *The cup of blessing which we bless, is it not the communion of the blood of Christ? The bread which we break, is it not the communion of the body of Christ?*

Thanks be to God for this great gift. Christ's saving Body and sacred Blood are still offered to us, we still renew the memory of his Death, and dedicate ourselves, our souls and bodies, to serve Him. He bought us once for all, but we recall that ransom, lay hold on that deliverance, partake in the new life that He came to bring. Let us only beware of turning those blessings into a curse by coming near with a profane heart.

17. *For we being many are one bread, and one body: for we are all partakers of that one bread.*

One loaf is made out of many grains of wheat, one body consists of many limbs and parts; so Jesus our Lord embraces in his Church innumerable souls. They are all fed by the same grace, taught the same faith, joined by the same hope; all their outward earthly distinctions vanish in the thought that they are members of His Church here and preparing to join His saints in heaven.

18. *Behold Israel after the flesh: are not they which eat of the sacrifices partakers of the altar?*

The Jews who shared in the peace-offerings under the law renewed thereby their covenant with God and declared themselves His servants, they fed at His Table and thanked Him for His goodness. Lord, when I come to join in the peace-offering of a better covenant, let me do so with love and gratitude. Christ Jesus is wholly offered up to God in our Christian sacrifice, and yet wholly given back to us to satisfy our needs.

19. *What say I then? that the idol is any thing, or that which is offered in sacrifice to idols is any thing? 20. But I say, that the things which the Gentiles sacrifice, they sacrifice to devils, and not to God: and I would not that ye should have fellowship with devils.*

Many brave Christians have gone through every kind of suffering, nay, have died, sooner than join in an idol feast; they knew indeed that the idol was a mere imposture, but they would sooner die than be thought worshippers of such a foul, hideous thing; it seemed to them an intolerable shame even to pretend to give God's glory to another. Where is that loyal heart nowadays?

21. *Ye cannot drink the cup of the Lord, and the cup of*

devils: ye cannot be partakers of the Lord's table, and of the table of devils.

The cup of devils is offered, the table of devils is spread, wherever filthy words and drunkenness and blasphemy make merry-making hateful. Lord, in how many streets this deadly poisonous feast is offered to Thy servants! Be pleased so to nourish my heart with Thy heavenly food that I may turn aside from evil. Which shall I choose, that Bread and Cup which bring God to me, and knit me to God, or the deceitful, ruinous, enticing pleasures in which fools delight?

22. Do we provoke the Lord to jealousy? are we stronger than he?

Some people's church-going, communions, prayers, are as careless and irreverent as if they went there to mock at God. They pass from His altar lightly, and at once turn their back on Him and go with His enemies. Would you treat any earthly friend so? Take care you do not turn all the Lord's gifts to your own ruin by insulting the gracious Giver.

23. All things are lawful for me, but all things are not expedient: all things are lawful for me, but all things edify not. 24. Let no man seek his own, but every man another's wealth.

Do not do what may offend your brethren or lead them astray. God has given into your care some dear souls to be brought up for Him and led gently towards heaven, and if you were to encourage them by any act of yours to despise religion you would do infinite harm. Rather, dear friend, live with some strictness of temperance, some carefulness of speech, some formality of devotion, than tempt the Lord's little ones to sinful indulgence by your too careless life. It is a noble sacrifice to give up one's own liberty for others' sake.

25. Whatsoever is sold in the shambles, that eat, asking no question for conscience sake: 26. for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof.

A Christian going to market is still a Christian. He does not leave his religion behind him, he goes to buy or to sell those gifts which his heavenly Father has largely provided. Honesty, peacefulness, a friendly temper, go with him all day and rule his proceedings. He does not rail or contend, but behaves as one who has to give account to God.

27. If any of them that believe not bid you to a feast, and ye be disposed to go; whatsoever is set before you, eat, asking no question for conscience sake. 28. But if any man say unto you, This is offered in sacrifice unto idols, eat not for his sake

that shewed it, and for conscience sake : for the earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof:

A Christian at an entertainment is still a Christian. He eats and drinks temperately, and is careful not to do harm to any one by his behaviour. Lord, give me this abiding sense of responsibility. I pray that neither luxuries, nor mirth, nor praise may ever make me forget that I am Thy servant. Thou hast cheered my path by holiday seasons and pleasant friends, but these must not lead me from Thee.

29. Conscience, I say, not thine own, but of the other : for why is my liberty judged of another man's conscience ? 30. For if I by grace be a partaker, why am I evil spoken of for that for which I give thanks ?

Some people cannot bear their liberty to be abridged. Are they not free to do what they like on Sundays, to attend such and such places of amusement, spend their money in such and such a manner? can we find them any commandment against it? Yet the rule of love says always, "Behave so as to lead no one else astray, upset no one ; do not give occasion to your brethren to speak evil of you ; it were better to deny yourself in little things than seem to give a bad example which might lead others from God."

31. Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.

" This is the famous stone
That turneth all to gold."

All the common actions of life are sanctified by this principle. God's glory comes first ; He made me, died for me, spreads bounties round me, my daily food is a pledge and token of His goodness. Let my life and actions, poor and fleeting as they are, be directed toward showing forth His praise, and confirming others in the same temper. Out of what I eat or drink let no ill-consequence come to myself or another.

32. Give none offence, neither to the Jews, nor to the Gentiles, nor to the church of God :

How great wisdom is needed for this ! only God can give it. All round us are so many tender consciences, hasty judgments, unsettled minds ; is it possible to pass through the world without giving occasion to those around to think us superstitious, or profane, or perhaps silly ? yet trust in God, act with a single eye to His glory and your brethren's profit, and God will make all misunderstandings right at last.

33. Even as I please all men in all things, not seeking mine own profit, but the profit of many, that they may be saved.

What a gain, to win souls for God! S. Paul put aside his own comfort and credit, but he longed to fill God's Church on earth and in heaven with redeemed mankind. All else he would give up, but he clung to this as his one object in life. What a joy for him at the end of his course to come as a faithful shepherd bringing his sheep with him!

CHAPTER XI.

1. He reproveth them, because in holy assemblies 4. their men prayed with their heads covered, and 6. women with their heads uncovered, 17. and because generally their meetings were not for the better but for the worse, as 21. namely in profaning with their own feasts the Lord's supper. 23. Lastly, he calleth them to the first institution thereof.

BE ye followers of me, even as I also am of Christ.

There is the highest pattern of all; we should follow human worthies as far as and no farther than they themselves follow Christ. The Son of God stooped from His glory to lead a humble and self-sacrificing life on earth, and all human goodness since then, if it is real, must have some relation to that Divine example. If it has nothing of Christ about it, it rings false and cannot be true metal.

2. Now I praise you, brethren, that ye remember me in all things, and keep the ordinances, as I delivered them to you.

We too should remember those from whom we learned the faith, and keep to the rules they taught us. God gave us through their means the knowledge of salvation, which is the greatest of all benefits. Let our glory be to bear in mind our dear friends and the good things that we learned from them, not, as some do, to despise all who went before us.

3. But I would have you know, that the head of every man is Christ; and the head of the woman is the man; and the head of Christ is God.

Obedience is the rule in God's creation. Christ the Lord, as man, received His calling, His words, His gifts from the Father Who sent Him, His glory was to do that Father's Will. Man too must look up to His Redeemer and expect purity, truth, freedom from sin at His hands. The Christian's delight is to feel "Not I, but my Master; I have nothing, but He is full of all graces." And in like manner a wife should refer to her husband as her guide, she seeks no honour or pleasure apart from him, his welfare is the end of her thoughts.

4. Every man praying or prophesying, having his head covered, dishonoureth his head.

In my prayers I may look up straight to God's throne. There are no dark figures between my soul and Him; I have been redeemed from sin and made His child; He regards me in Christ, and so puts my unworthiness out of sight. Nay, I do not want even the Blessed Virgin or the saints to present my prayers before the throne of grace; I depend on one only Mediator, and claim to be heard for His sake.

5. But every woman that prayeth or prophesieth with her head uncovered dishonoureth her head: for that is even all one as if she were shaven. 6. For if the woman be not covered, let her also be shorn: but if it be a shame for a woman to be shorn or shaven, let her be covered.

By the fashion of a covered head the apostle meant to teach women a modest and gentle behaviour. He bade them avoid whatever would be reckoned unbecoming or take them out of their proper place. He loved that all things should go on in the Church orderly and quietly, according to the instinct which God puts within us; the Gospel does not upset what nature teaches, but only sanctifies its wise lessons.

7. For a man indeed ought not to cover his head, forasmuch as he is the image and glory of God: but the woman is the glory of the man.

Lord, keep men from throwing away this glorious image, let not drunkenness or uncleanness ruin that heavenly purity and honour which Thou hast won back for us. What are we if we forget Thee from Whom our glory comes? Lord, keep women from forgetting those duties in which their true glory lies, breathe into the hearts of young women a spirit of modesty, tenderness, and obedience. How thoughtless they are if they live only for display!

8. For the man is not of the woman; but the woman of the man. 9. Neither was the man created for the woman; but the woman for the man.

Bible history tells us that woman was created at the first out of the side of man, and to be his helpmeet. God designed her to care for man, and in turn to receive care from him. Eden was not complete till she appeared there. How many happy homes since then have proved God's loving-kindness in appointing married life for our mutual support and consolation! How many wives have helped their husbands to serve God!

10. For this cause ought the woman to have power on her head because of the angels.

Angels praise God with us. They would fain see in our congregation that same reverence, modesty, single-hearted praise, which prevails in heavenly choirs. Sometimes in church a gaudy dress, vain glances idle chattering, mark that girls have brought the world in with them, and forgotten that the glorious God and His angels are near.

11. Nevertheless neither is the man without the woman, neither the woman without the man, in the Lord. 12. For as the woman is of the man, even so is the man also by the woman; but all things of God.

Christ makes all one in Him, He gives husband and wife their several duties. Marriage is—

“Blind idolatry no more,
But a sweet help and pattern of true love.”

He was Himself born of a woman, He shows us in His holy mother an example of what Christian mothers ought to be. Home duties are meant to train us in loving and serving God.

13. Judge in yourselves: is it comely that a woman pray unto God uncovered? 14. Doth not even nature itself teach you, that, if a man have long hair, it is a shame unto him? 15. but if a woman have long hair, it is a glory to her: for her hair is given her for a covering.

S. Paul meant that the short hair of men, the long locks of women, are agreeable to our natural feeling. God has planted in our hearts wise instincts of modesty and reverence, let us take care not to pluck them up. The holy Gospel, with all its Divine power, was not meant to take women out of their place or upset the customs of society. God's way of influence is that of gentleness; indeed He does marvellous works through the prayers and love of good women, but still suitably to His own order.

16. But if any man seem to be contentious, we have no such custom, neither the churches of God.

This is the good old rule by which catholic Christians go. Let us have no other faith or worship but such as was set up at the first, and has prevailed throughout the Church. We would believe and worship like the saints of old, that is enough for us. Stand on the old ways and you will be safe. This applies not only to small things, like women covering their heads, but to all matters which are in dispute amongst Christians.

17. Now in this that I declare unto you I praise you not, that ye come together not for the better, but for the worse.

What can church-going do harm to any one? Yes, Satan can turn even good things to our ruin. What profaneness and mockery,

what idle gossip, what careless, sinful ways have come of persons meeting in church, but forgetting what place it is! I fear that often Christians have come home after church much worse than they were instead of better.

- 18. For first of all, when ye come together in the church, I hear that there be divisions among you; and I partly believe it. 19. For there must be also heresies among you, that they which are approved may be made manifest among you.*

How much we should be on our guard against the spirit of division, which crept in even amongst apostolic Christians! Let us learn to cling to what is good and abhor the evil; certainly some good does come out of strife and division, we tighten our hold on eternal truths, and on true Christians, while trifles and trifling characters are manifested as nothing. Yet, Lord, give peace in our time; we have too much of divisions and parties, a season of peace will do us more good now.

- 20. When ye come together therefore into one place, this is not to eat the Lord's supper. 21. For in eating every one taketh before other his own supper: and one is hungry, and another is drunken.*

What believers in those days did was to meet together for a common meal in token of goodwill, after the pattern of our Saviour's last Supper; then they afterwards received Holy Communion together; but this brought them into great danger, for they made a real meal of their supper, and so the poor came off worst while the rich had plenty, also they became quite unfit to take the Lord's Body and Blood afterwards. The apostles saw the evil of this, so they led the Church to separate their feasts of charity altogether from the Blessed Sacrament, and take the latter early in the morning instead of at night.

- 22. What? have ye not houses to eat and to drink in? or despise ye the church of God, and shame them that have not? What shall I say to you? shall I praise you in this? I praise you not.*

A church is for worship, not for the world's ways; the poor should be treated with kindness, not despised or made to feel their inferiority. Does God find our behaviour in His house and towards His poor praiseworthy or blameworthy? indeed we have reason to fear His judgment, man's praise or blame matters less.

- 23. For I have received of the Lord that which also I delivered unto you, That the Lord Jesus the same night in which he was betrayed took bread:*

Our Communions should take our minds back to that night on which

Christ our Lord gave up Himself to die for us. He thought only how to save us. He made a plan to give Himself once as our Ransom, and continually as our Food. This is the very heart of true faith, that God's Son gave Himself to die for my sins, and lets me daily draw into my heart the virtue of His precious Death. S. Paul was taught this truth from heaven, and he bids us learn it too.

24. *And when he had given thanks, he brake it, and said, Take, eat: this is my body, which is broken for you: this do in remembrance of me.*

What ! am I in danger of forgetting my Redeemer ? Nay, He knows best ; your wisdom is to do this as He bade you, and thus remember His love. The world and our own frailty incline us easily to forget, and therefore our Lord, Who knows what we are, appointed a special way of remembering that great love on which we entirely depend. He died once for all, but we may continually renew the memory of that offering.

25. *After the same manner also he took the cup, when he had supped, saying, This cup is the new testament in my blood: this do ye, as oft as ye drink it, in remembrance of me.*

The blood of the Old Testament sacrifices spoke of sins, but the Blood of the New Testament tells of forgiveness. We behold at God's altar the living spring that flowed from Christ's side, we learn its power to wash out every sin, old and new. Our Saviour's words made this cup life-giving, a medicine for our souls. What can hurt us if He has paid such a price to redeem us ? Those who never come to Holy Communion lose their Master's precious lesson of His love which He bade us all learn.

26. *For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come.*

This runs through the ages, from Christ's Death till His glorious return again ; instead of His visible bodily presence we have now a sign and figure of it only. He is near, and one day He will display His glory before all eyes ; meanwhile believers know where to find Him, they plead the memory of His Death before heaven and earth, and in doing this they meet Him, though unseen.

27. *Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord.*

What is eating or drinking unworthily ? It seems to mean here coming carelessly, with no thought what the Sacrament is, and what hearts we are bringing to it. Here is Christ, God and Man, full of love and holiness ; here is a communicant who has not troubled himself to prepare, who pays no attention, whose careless life, and sharp tongue, and foul thoughts have gone with him right up to

the church door; is not there something of insult about such an approach?

28. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup.

Try me, O God, and seek the ground of my heart, prove me and examine my thoughts. Let me know my own sins, and sincerely grieve for them; my own temptations, and so resolve to fight bravely; my needs, and so pray earnestly. How can I spend communion-time aright unless I know what I am, and what I want God to do for me?

29. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body.

God meant this heavenly food for my great profit and comfort, I cannot get harm by it unless I come with irreverence or in deadly sin. It is true my communions are not as fervent as they should be, but yet my Master knows that I wish to love Him, and that I believe in what He has done for me. I dare not keep away from His Table lest I forget Him altogether; that would be worst of all.

30. For this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep. 31. For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged. 32. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world.

Visible judgments sometimes come and show God's wrath on our profane ways; again, His thunder sleeps and no sign appears, we go on wickedly, and all prospers with us; this is far more terrible. Let us ask Him to punish us in this world, that so we may turn to repentance and escape His wrath in the world to come. His judgments here are salutary as well as bitter, but they warn us of a graver loss which may have no remedy.

33. Wherefore, my brethren, when ye come together to eat, tarry one for another. 34. And if any man hunger, let him eat at home; that ye come not together unto condemnation. And the rest will I set in order when I come.

The feast of charity should be only a figurative meal, in which all with order and reverence took some food together as a sign of fellowship, and afterwards addressed themselves to communicate. All this soon passed away, but the spirit of it is that we should come to the altar in charity with our brethren, and ready to give up our own pleasure to do them good. If we think what Christ has done for us, our dull hearts will be stirred up to do something for our brethren.

CHAPTER XII.

1. Spiritual gifts 4. are divers, 7. yet all to profit withal. 8. And to that end are diversely bestowed: 12. that by the like proportion, as the members of a natural body tend all to the 16. mutual decency, 22. service, and 26. succour of the same body; 27. so we should do one for another, to make up the mystical body of Christ.

NOW concerning spiritual gifts, brethren, I would not have you ignorant.

Lord, teach us also concerning spiritual gifts, that we may understand that they all proceed from Thee, and are meant to be used humbly and profitably. Many waste or misuse the endowments that God bestows on them. He lays out His rich treasures upon us, and we are often none the better for it, because of our pride, self-will, and discontent.

2. *Ye know that ye were Gentiles, carried away unto these dumb idols, even as ye were led.*

That was the condition of the heathen, they were ignorant and superstitious, worshippers of dumb idols that could not help them. What a state of spiritual darkness that was! Yet there are some under the light of the Gospel who forget God's reasonable service, and set up their own idols in their hearts again; they are hurried away blindly by passion or covetous desire, forgetting the freedom into which Christ has brought them.

3. *Wherefore I give you to understand, that no man speaking by the Spirit of God calleth Jesus accursed: and that no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost.*

Our Christian faith is a great gift of God. We believe and confess the one true God, and Jesus His Son, our Saviour, and this by the grace of the Holy Spirit. Glory to God for bringing us out of darkness into His marvellous light! Let us remember that all those who hold this faith are our brethren and on the same side with us; they and we have one Master, and are going one way.

4. *Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit.*
 5. *And there are differences of administrations, but the same Lord.*
 6. *And there are diversities of operations, but it is the same God which worketh all in all.*

Here we observe the Holy and Blessed Trinity working out the plan of man's salvation. The Holy Spirit is the life of redeemed

mankind, Jesus Christ their Master, Almighty God the Source of their blessedness. "Lord, what is man, that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man, that thou visitest him?" What are we and our works in the presence of infinite Power and Love that works so mightily, gives so richly, reveals so wonderfully?

7. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to every man to profit withal.

Why has God given me power of speech or of reason, set me over my brethren, made me to be looked up to and considered? Why has He increased my means, enlarged my information? Did He mean me to strut about in vainglory and rejoice in my own excellence? No, indeed, that would soon turn to mischief; I should be losing and wasting all if I went on that plan. He meant me to be of use; all I have and am is designed to profit some souls. I am merely the bringer of God's gifts to them.

8. For to one is given by the Spirit the word of wisdom; to another the word of knowledge by the same Spirit;

These are gifts of high thoughts and deep feelings. Some Christians are allowed to see deep into revealed truth, to feel its power, to live a life hidden with God and comprehending much of His dealings; their life is a quiet one outwardly, but they study His Will and learn heavenly mysteries. What such persons need is to cherish a humble and kindly heart; what profit will all their high thoughts be, if they lose love?

9. To another faith by the same Spirit; to another the gifts of healing by the same Spirit;

These are gifts of power; a stedfast victorious faith that can work marvels, a strength to remove the disorders and troubles of mankind, to overcome difficulties and bring about great changes for the better. If it pleases God to give us endowments of this kind, let us keep them fresh by prayer and heavenly thoughts; a life that is all activity is in danger of being self-willed and shallow. How can we do any lasting good except by God's grace?

10. To another the working of miracles; to another prophecy; to another discerning of spirits; to another divers kinds of tongues; to another the interpretation of tongues:

These are gifts of practical understanding, such as readiness to apprehend, remember, and impart truth. God shows me things quickly; I learn and remember, I can write and speak easily; let me then be diligent to use these gifts to my brethren's good and God's glory. How many have not had my opportunities! I acknowledge that loving Providence which has watched over my days, and helped me to learn about heavenly and earthly things.

11. But all these worketh that one and the selfsame Spirit, dividing to every man severally as he will.

Lord, keep me from envying or from desponding. Thou hast given me the right place and the right gifts. I have no business to wish I had the position that others have. Thy gracious goodness has appointed me my work, and given me sufficient means to do it. I see in my life no mere chance at work, but an overruling love.

12. For as the body is one, and hath many members, and all the members of that one body, being many, are one body : so also is Christ.

No limb can be cut off from the body, or act against the rest of the body, without being destroyed. A body means a unity of parts in one breathing, living, conscious frame, all obeying one impulse ; for the limbs to start asunder is death. What a lesson to be learned by every family, every household ! How can life go on amongst us unless we feel for and work with one another ?

13. For by one Spirit are we all baptized into one body, whether we be Jews or Gentiles, whether we be bond or free ; and have been all made to drink into one Spirit.

This is the Holy Catholic Church, the communion of saints, which we profess in the Creed ; it consists of all Christians knit together under Christ their Head ; it is begun in Holy Baptism, nourished by Holy Communion, quickened by the Spirit of God, Which gives life to each part. Lord, Who hast brought me into this glorious society, grant that I may live to serve it and further its interests ; let its prayers, hymns, missions, good works, be ever dear to my heart ; let me one day behold it glorified in heaven.

14. For the body is not one member, but many.

Down with selfishness and pride ! You must live for your brethren and perform your duties to them. May be you have gifts of learning, or of money, or hold a high position in the Church ; ay, but an old woman, a day-labourer, a servant, a child, is your fellow-member in Christ, redeemed by the same Blood, fed by the same grace, preparing for the same heaven.

15. If the foot shall say, Because I am not the hand, I am not of the body ; is it therefore not of the body ? 16. And if the ear shall say, Because I am not the eye, I am not of the body ; is it therefore not of the body ? 17. If the whole body were an eye, where were the hearing ? If the whole were hearing, where were the smelling ?

Foot and hand, eye and ear, do their own work for the common good without envying or disputing. God has given to each its own

use and fitness. What matters it whether I am a hand for rough work, or a foot to bear burdens, or an ear to take hold of learning, or an eye to discover the way? My merciful Father has wisely appointed my work, and bids me do it without repining. Whatever I have to do must be done for God's sake and as perfectly as I can do it. Then my part of the body at least will go on well.

18. But now hath God set the members every one of them in the body, as it hath pleased him.

Why am I poor and others well off? Why have I to obey, to learn, to give up? Nay, why have I to suffer pain and loss? Why am I in this place in life instead of some other which seems so much more desirable? Nay, it is the Lord. His Will is our furthest reason of all; some one must be Master. I acknowledge, O Lord, Thy wise disposition, and humbly submit myself to it.

19. And if they were all one member, where were the body?
20. But now are they many members, yet but one body.

Peace and order will make the happiness of heaven. Saints and angels love that temper; if a discontented mind got in there, it would spoil all. Lord, let our various trials here on earth teach us our need of each other and of Thee. All that we have is given us by God wherewith to do our work for His Church. We cannot live an independent life; nothing in creation is independent.

21. And the eye cannot say unto the hand, I have no need of thee: nor again the head to the feet, I have no need of you.

The eye is quick to perceive, the brain to reason; nay, but the diligent hand and lowly foot are equally needful for the perfection of our nature. Remember always that the Church does not consist merely of the clergy, nor is it meant to be a luxury for a few chosen souls. God has room there for all natures, and employs all kinds of work, accepts all honest callings as performed for His glory.

22. Nay, much more those members of the body, which seem to be more feeble, are necessary: 23. and those members of the body, which we think to be less honourable, upon these we bestow more abundant honour; and our uncomely parts have more abundant comeliness.

Just so, dear friend; many persons on whom you are inclined to look down are dear to God; they lack splendid gifts, they suffer poverty or disgrace, they are ignorant and simple, yet their faith is precious in God's sight. He esteems honourable and needful to His Church many Christians whom the world despises. Their souls are beautiful in His eyes.

24. For our comely parts have no need: but God hath tem-

pered the body together, having given more abundant honour to that part which lacked : 25. that there should be no schism in the body ; but that the members should have the same care one for another.

"O loving wisdom of our God!" He has so ordered the natural body that a common sympathy, and reverence, and support exists between its different parts ; and so it is with the spiritual body : there all that is good in me is called out by the need or sorrow of some other of Christ's members, and their best qualities in turn by my necessities. What a barren, miserable, besotted fool I should be if I tried to live only for myself ! I should be like a bandaged useless limb, unable to take its share in the body's work.

26. And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it ; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it.

Do you live in selfish ease while your brethren suffer ? do you feel gloomy discontent and envy when any honour falls to them ? Seek from God a heart that feels for your brethren's joys or sorrows. What greater blessing is there than to be able to bring consolation, to set a repentant sinner in the way again, to share in men's hopes and prospects ! Learn never to despise any, or hate any, or despair of any. God may have great designs for them and for you.

27. Now ye are the body of Christ, and members in particular.

If this is our Christian condition, to be Christ's members, then we must live by His Spirit, fulfil His acts in taking up the Cross and dying to sin, rise to a new life as He rose ; we must have in us a spark of that self-sacrificing love which He showed. We belong to a certain family, neighbourhood, country, and nation ; ay, but these ties are all of earth, and at the font we became sharers in a new relationship which is heavenly.

28. And God hath set some in the church, first apostles, secondarily prophets, thirdly teachers, after that miracles, then gifts of healings, helps, governments, diversities of tongues.

Thank God, we have the apostles' writings to guide us, and we have their authority and power continued among us, though they themselves are gone. We have prophets and teachers in God's Word, and the Church's teaching, and many holy books and wise men. Miracles are gone, but God does not deny wonderful gifts of heart and mind, remedies for sick souls and bodies. He has not left His Church destitute of His blessings.

29. Are all apostles ? are all prophets ? are all teachers ?

are all workers of miracles? 30. have all the gifts of healing? do all speak with tongues? do all interpret?

Do not envy others' gifts, do not despise your own. The Lord of glory may not have given you a very high place, or any very grand endowments, nevertheless you have some faculties you may improve by study, some hearts to love, some truths to learn. He has set you where you can do your work, and so help forward His kingdom. You can speak to some one of God's love, help some one to bear their daily burden, comfort and heal where suffering has come; then, dear friend, God has opened His treasure-house to you, and given you gifts worth having.

31. But covet earnestly the best gifts: and yet shew I unto you a more excellent way.

Lord, I desire to rise; I would fain speak better, write better, be more trusted, know more. I want to improve myself and my condition. Yet keep me from forgetting those humble virtues which grow at the foot of the Cross; without them my heart will dry up, even though I have won all men's praise.

CHAPTER XIII.

1. All gifts, 2, 3. how excellent soever, are nothing worth without charity
4. The praises thereof, and 13. prelation before hope and faith.

THOUGH I speak with the tongues of men and of angels and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

Fair words ring false where no love is; a clever, persuasive speech, a winning manner, prevail for a time, but true love has its own utterance, which speaks to the heart. Whatever I say, even though my words be simple and hesitating, let me always speak the truth in love, and then my tongue will heal and do good, not harm.

2. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

Genius and learning are nothing without love, great exploits are nothing without love. My soaring ambition longs to be distinguished, to be looked up to for great gifts, to win praise for my success; ah! God would have me cultivate a tender heart, He values that more than men's praise. What misery it is when all

men around glorify me, but love is extinguished within ! A simple, loving heart that can pray, and feel for suffering, and seek to do good, is worth many a brilliant genius.

3. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

I give alms freely, I go to frequent services, I stand up for the Church boldly, I would do and suffer all things for the catholic faith ; is not this true religion ? Nay, God looks deeper. He is not content even with all these sacrifices, unless they are offered in a spirit of love. How easily even religion may become vainglorious, bitter, and formal ! how great need we have to consider our religious duties and see what their true spirit is !

4. Charity suffereth long, and is kind ; charity envieth not ; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, 5. doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil ;

Here are signs whereby to know true charity. What a great gift it is, and how rare in its perfection ! Where is one who is patient and gentle, kind and unselfish, contented with a little, not easily put out, loving only what is good ? Grant us, Lord, this beautiful and happy temper which would make earth almost like heaven ; let us seek others' welfare before our own, bear with their failings, rejoice to see good in them. How well a household will go on if true charity is found in parlour and in kitchen !

6. Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth ;

Many people hear scandal with pleasure, they are glad to find some high character brought low, some new revelation made of men's vileness ; but a true Christian is pained and shocked to hear of harm done, he grieves over lost innocence, he delights to hear news of God's truth spreading and of souls changed from evil to good. This is a great proof of what we really are, to see what kind of news we like to hear. God grant us to take pleasure only in the good, and put away the evil.

7. Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeith all things, endureth all things.

I should bear all my friend's faults, believe all the good that I can about him, hope for his progress in all that is right, endure all annoyances he may cause me. What is love worth unless it rejoices to forget itself ? Lord, Thou hast so mercifully borne with me and endured my imperfections that I am encouraged to hope and believe in Thy forbearing mercy for time to come. I ought never to weary of helping any souls for whom Thou hast died.

8. Charity never faileth : but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail ; whether there be tongues, they shall cease ; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

Keen penetration, ready speech, deep learning, are all useful in this world, but yet threescore years and ten are soon over. What outfit have we for eternity ? All these gifts are tools for our work here, but work and tools will soon all be laid aside. How can we get ready for the heavenly country, get acquainted with the language that the blessed speak, or prepare to share in their employment ? That is a grave question which meets us sometimes.

9. For we know in part, and we prophesy in part. 10. But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

Even the teaching of Scripture will be no more needed then. We shall see God more clearly and understand His ways better than was possible here on earth ; indeed we should be zealous in learning all the good we can, but yet look forward to something brighter to come. Scripture and Sacraments are like scaffolding-poles ; when God's house is all built, they will be wanted no more.

11. When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child : but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

Here on earth we are at school, getting ready for eternity. God gives us some hard lessons, but at last we shall comprehend their meaning. Our duties in this life, our trade, our books, our work, are but like children's studies and games, meant to train us for something to come ; one day they will all be put on the shelf, and we shall start off to our Father's home with our education finished. God grant that we may have learned our lesson rightly.

12. For now we see through a glass, darkly ; but then face to face : now I know in part ; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

How little we know now of God, or of our own hearts, or of those we love best ! Mysteries surround us on every side. God shows us a little of His truth, all seems bright for a moment, then darkness comes over again. Lord, let me so persevere through the twilight of this life, that I may enjoy the clear bright sunshine of heaven. I am contented to see only a step or two now, and wait for that light to come.

13. And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three ; but the greatest of these is charity.

Faith begins the Christian life, hope carries it on, but only love can crown it ; again, charity or love must be found in our faith and our

hope, if they are real. How many other things I set my heart upon! and yet if I can get these three precious gifts I am sufficiently furnished. Lord, I believe firmly in Thy truth, I hope for Thy mercy, I love Thy goodness, and I desire to have Thee as my Guide over death.

CHAPTER XIV.

1. Prophecy is commended, 2, 3, 4. and preferred before speaking with tongues, 6. by a comparison drawn from musical instruments. 12. Both must be referred to edification, 22. as to their true and proper end. 26. The true use of each is taught, 27. and the abuse taxed. 34. Women are forbidden to speak in the church.

FOLOW after charity, and desire spiritual gifts, but rather that ye may prophesy.

Graces and gifts are very different; grace affects the character, makes us more loving, pure, and humble, whereas gifts or endowments are not part of ourselves, though God is pleased to lend them to us for a while for our work in the world. Let us desire the useful ones rather than those that are showy, but yet never lose hold of the love of God, which is worth them all.

2. *For he that speaketh in an unknown tongue speaketh not unto men, but unto God: for no man understandeth him; howbeit in the spirit he speaketh mysteries.* 3. *But he that prophesieth speaketh unto men to edification, and exhortation, and comfort.*

It is not enough to enjoy times of sweet communion with God, unless we come forth and teach our brethren about Him. If I please myself only with my religious privileges am I not selfish? All round me are souls needing to be built up, stirred up, comforted; Lord, give me wisdom to see their needs and say a word in season, let the moments I spend alone with Thee help me to speak of Thy truth rightly. Prophecy means here the gift of declaring God's truth to men's hearts. I too may be a prophet in this sense.

4. *He that speaketh in an unknown tongue edifieth himself; but he that prophesieth edifieth the church.*

What a great work for frail man to do, to edify God's Church! He is the great Architect, and the foundation has been laid by Him, yet He bids us each in our measure work at the walls. One day the glorious building will all be done, those will be happy then whose words and example have edified, not hindered or pulled down.

5. *I would that ye all spoke with tongues, but rather that*

ye prophesied : for greater is he that prophesieth than he that speaketh with tongues, except he interpret, that the church may receive edifying.

Speaking with tongues was a kind of ecstasy in which the believers of those days were carried out of themselves, and spoke of mysteries which they did not comprehend in languages that they had never learned. God seemed too near, salvation too precious, heaven too glorious, for their minds to contain what they felt. Prophesying meant what we should call the gift of teaching, it enabled those who had it to enlighten the ignorant and explain Scripture, it was not so marvellous as the tongues, but did more good. This last is the gift that is best for us.

6. Now, brethren, if I come unto you speaking with tongues, what shall I profit you, except I shall speak to you either by revelation, or by knowledge, or by prophesying, or by doctrine ?

My life should be for my brethren to profit by, not merely for them to admire. Fine words, warm feelings, daring, and skill, and beauty, make a stir in the world ; but let my path be the humble one of an upright and godly life, learning quietly every day from God, and so able to tell at last something of His mercy from my own experience. In Scripture are great treasures ; I would like to dig some out by frequent study, and so be able to impart the rich store.

7. And even things without life giving sound, whether pipe or harp, except they give a distinction in the sounds, how shall it be known what is piped or harped ? 8. For if the trumpet give an uncertain sound, who shall prepare himself to the battle ? 9. So likewise ye, except ye utter by the tongue words easy to be understood, how shall it be known what is spoken ? for ye shall speak into the air.

“In vain with dull and tuneless ear
I linger by soft Music’s cell.”

Music has no message for me, I cannot enjoy its sweetness as some do, or find encouragement in its trumpet-call which stirs soldiers up to fight and die; nay, but God has His own harmonies which speak even to the deaf. The Life and Death of Jesus are all in tune with my soul, the death of saints is like a battle-march, the heavenly Jerusalem has its own concert in which I too can take part.

10. There are, it may be, so many kinds of voices in the world, and none of them is without signification. 11. Therefore if I know not the meaning of the voice, I shall be unto him that speaketh a barbarian, and he that speaketh shall be a barbarian unto me. 12. Even so ye, forasmuch as ye are

zealous of spiritual gifts, seek that ye may excel to the edifying of the church.

When a believer speaks of conversion, of heaven, of Christ's Cross, to one who is indifferent to religion, he seems to use a foreign tongue, his hearer listens but sees no meaning in it all. When shall we see a common experience of Christ's love open hearts, break down differences, put all on one level before God's throne? The Holy Spirit has His own language beyond words, but by prayer we learn to understand and speak it.

13. Wherefore let him that speaketh in an unknown tongue pray that he may interpret. 14. For if I pray in an unknown tongue, my spirit prayeth, but my understanding is unfruitful. 15. What is it then? I will pray with the spirit, and I will pray with the understanding also: I will sing with the spirit, and I will sing with the understanding also.

In reading Holy Scripture, in prayers, in hymns, let me offer up to God a reasonable service; let my understanding go with the words, feel God's goodness, see His message for myself, acknowledge His wonders in past time. Sometimes I have listened, or read, unfruitfully, as if the words were in a strange language, but I will try now to learn the Holy Spirit's meaning; many great scholars miss this, and simple believers catch it up. God grant that the spread of learning in these days may lead more of His children to praise Him with understanding, instead of finding interest in nothing but the devil's songs.

16. Else when thou shalt bless with the spirit, how shall he that occupieth the room of the unlearned say Amen at thy giving of thanks, seeing he understandeth not what thou sayest? 17. For thou verily givest thanks well, but the other is not edified.

There are many to whom the Prayer Book appears written in a strange tongue. They stay away from church, or attend there with little profit; perhaps they like the sermon, but nothing else. Yet the psalms and prayers are for all; the Communion service is one great offering of thanks for Christ's Death; in Holy Baptism we see our own promises and calling; every service that goes on in church is full of lessons. Lord, teach Thy people to value the prayers and join in them devoutly. It is a great blessing for us that we have churches and Bibles open, and God's praises in our own tongue.

18. I thank my God, I speak with tongues more than ye all: 19. yet in the church I had rather speak five words with my understanding, that by my voice I might teach others also, than ten thousand words in an unknown tongue.

What makes us talk so much? It is the wish to lord it over others, we wish them to think much of us, admire our deep feelings or wise words, depend on us for information. We speak ten thousand words to show off, for every five which do real good. S. Paul knew how much better are five simple words that come from a true heart than a multitude of grand phrases that end in nothing. God has given us a wonderful gift of speech; how we have wasted and misused it! Christians in old time were tempted to vanity by having this marvellous power of praising God in unknown languages, that gift has ceased, but not the danger of vanity.

20. Brethren, be not children in understanding: howbeit in malice be ye children, but in understanding be men.

The childlike temper which our Lord Jesus recommends (S. Mark x. 15) means purity, teachableness, a trustful and happy temper that bears no malice, has no crooked aims, welcomes kindness gratefully; but He would have us grown men in knowing good from evil. What! has God taught us so long, and we are still so silly that the least praise makes us vain, the least annoyance upsets us, the least distraction makes us forget our duty! Here are sad examples of childhood going on too long, we ought to have learned to be men by this time.

21. In the law it is written, With men of other tongues and other lips will I speak unto this people; and yet for all that will they not hear me, saith the Lord. 22. Wherefore tongues are for a sign, not to them that believe, but to them that believe not: but prophesying serveth not for them that believe not, but for them which believe.

The Jews had despised the prophet Isaiah when he spoke to them as to children in plain warnings and teachings, so God sent on them in judgment the invasion of a foreign army whose speech was too hard for them to understand. Remember that plain teaching is a gift of God's mercy. The Bible, with its homely words, prayers, and hymns in which children can join, God's altar where the ignorant and poor are welcome, a preacher's voice that tells of common duties, are all meant for our salvation. Lord, bring down our pride, let us rejoice to believe and worship as Thy poor members do, the holy catholic faith is both for them and us.

23. If therefore the whole church be come together into one place, and all speak with tongues, and there come in those that are unlearned, or unbelievers, will they not say that ye are mad?

When the Gospel first spread in the world it brought with it these passionate bursts of feeling. Christians were carried out of themselves, they gave up all they had, lived in the thought of Christ's

immediate coming, expressed strange fervours of joy and wonder, set forth God's praise in unknown tongues; all this needed some restraint, the apostle bade them return to common duties and keep their feelings under. He sought to turn these gifts to the profit of all.

24. But if all prophesy, and there come in one that believeth not, or one unlearned, he is convinced of all, he is judged of all: 25. and thus are the secrets of his heart made manifest; and so falling down on his face he will worship God, and report that God is in you of a truth.

Ah, what preaching went on then! what proof of God's truth, what conviction of sin, what a sense of God's presence, what a deep reverence before Him! Let this be my experience in God's house, let me feel that God's Word is able to express my deepest feelings and to satisfy my deepest longings. This is the best of all evidences that the Gospel is Divine. What beside it can meet our sense of sin, and yet exalt and comfort us? When we have found that God is in His Church, let nothing draw us away from it.

26. How is it then, brethren? when ye come together, every one of you hath a psalm, hath a doctrine, hath a tongue, hath a revelation, hath an interpretation. Let all things be done unto edifying.

This is the rule which will set all straight. Seek not so much to amaze, or please, or interest, but to do good to those with whom you are. God has given you perhaps warm feelings and quick intelligence, perhaps other gifts of mind or body for which you may chance to be praised, and this is because He would have you edify your brethren. How great is the responsibility of those who are able to learn and tell of heavenly truth!

27. If any man speak in an unknown tongue, let it be by two, or at the most by three, and that by course; and let one interpret. 28. But if there be no interpreter, let him keep silence in the church; and let him speak to himself, and to God.

Those who poured out their feelings in strange tongues, yet could not interpret their meaning, were to keep silence in church and utter their inspired praises and prayers by themselves; God could hear and understand them. What a comfort it is to remember that many prayers which can scarcely find words are yet understood by God! He interprets our stammering tongues, and reads our hearts; in His presence the world's confusion and strife are shut out, we can speak quietly and listen for His answer.

29. Let the prophets speak two or three, and let the other judge. 30. If any thing be revealed to another that sitteth by,

let the first hold his peace. 31. *For ye may all prophesy one by one, that all may learn, and all may be comforted.* 32. *And the spirits of the prophets are subject to the prophets.* 33. *For God is not the author of confusion, but of peace, as in all churches of the saints.*

S. Paul laid down these rules to regulate the preaching which went on under the influence of God's Holy Spirit, when the first Christians met together. He bade them exercise this power in order, and with humility and good sense; it was given not to confound or upset souls, but to lead them gently to the foot of the Cross. All this was before regular pastors were appointed, or set forms of prayer drawn out, yet the abiding spirit of his advice is still of use to us. He tells us of the danger of very warm or strong feeling, bids us speak of religion in a sober way, points out that it is far better to be of use than to be admired.

34. *Let your women keep silence in the churches: for it is not permitted unto them to speak; but they are commanded to be under obedience, as also saith the law.* 35. *And if they will learn any thing, let them ask their husbands at home: for it is a shame for women to speak in the church.*

God has, in His wisdom, given different work to be done by men and by women. He would not have a reign of confusion, but that each should keep in their own place and do the work set for them. Women have, like Christ's own mother, to rule over home, guide and teach there, not to come forth and set the world in order. It is indeed wonderful what power they have of seeing what is right, and of guiding men into it; God makes them preachers indeed, but in a quiet and homely method, full of patience. Women must not minister in church, but who, like a woman, can restrain, or civilize, or comfort, or lead simple souls towards God?

36. *What? came the word of God out from you? or came it unto you only?*

The Holy Catholic Church throughout the world should be a guide to us in our religious practices. We are not the only believers, nor the earliest, many centuries of Christian experience lie behind for us to draw from. Let us rejoice to keep to the old worship, and creeds, and Scriptures, which guided our forefathers on their road towards heaven. If any one offers to teach us a new faith, we must refuse to listen.

37. *If any man think himself to be a prophet, or spiritual, let him acknowledge that the things that I write unto you are the commandments of the Lord.* 38. *But if any man be ignorant, let him be ignorant.*

God sent His apostles to govern the Church, we still observe their ordinances, and learn from their writings. This was of His great mercy, not to leave the world to itself after the Lord Jesus ascended, but to give Divine wisdom to the apostles wherewith they framed the Holy Catholic Church, and left it to us. God grant us to study the apostles' commands, and cling to that faith which they taught. Many prefer to be ignorant, but we will be grateful for the light we have, and use it.

39. Wherefore, brethren, covet to prophesy, and forbid not to speak with tongues. 40. Let all things be done decently and in order.

This is a good rule both for Church and home. Long indeed for God's good gifts, use thankfully what gifts you have, but remember that peace, order, and reverence should accompany all you do. The choir of a church, the hall of a palace, the meals of a poor family, working days or holidays, the life of a child or of a man, all come under this wise rule.

CHAPTER XV.

8. By Christ's resurrection, 12. he proveth the necessity of our resurrection, against all such as deny the resurrection of the body. 21. The fruit, 35. and manner thereof, 51. and of the changing of them, that shall be found alive at the last day.

MOREOVER, brethren, I declare unto you the gospel which I preached unto you, which also ye have received, and wherein ye stand; 2. by which also ye are saved, if ye keep in memory what I preached unto you, unless ye have believed in vain.

We have to thank God for many mercies. He sent the preachers of the gospel into this dark world. He caused us to live within reach of their message, He brought it home to our hearts, He has helped our frailty to persevere in it so far, we look for salvation through it. This is life and strength to us even when all around looks dark. Everything else is vanity, but this remains sure.

3. For I delivered unto you first of all that which I also received, how that Christ died for our sins according to the scriptures;

The Cross of Christ comes home, first of all doctrines, to the needs of men. We learn there that God is holy and yet merciful that

sin is hateful, that love can pardon sin, that self-sacrifice is the law by which the soul lives; all these great truths are represented to us in the Crucified Jesus, all the types and prophecies find their deepest meaning here, all the yearnings of mankind meet here.

4. And that he was buried, and that he rose again the third day according to the scriptures:

The Creed does not end with Christ's Death, there is His Burial and His glorious Rising again. As we have to share His Death by giving up sin, so we share in His Grave by a quiet and humble life, that withdraws from temptation and is content to remain unknown, and we share in His Resurrection by heavenly thoughts and desires; all the mysteries that Christ wrought are meant to be shown forth in our lives.

5. And that he was seen of Cephas, then of the twelve:

On Easter Day S. Peter saw the Risen Saviour, and the twelve (or rather ten disciples, strictly speaking) saw Him again at night. What feelings met in their minds, fear at first, then peace, then great joy! How they felt ashamed of their doubts! What kind and encouraging words their Lord spoke to them!

6. After that, he was seen of above five hundred brethren at once; of whom the greater part remain unto this present, but some are fallen asleep.

It would seem that this is the occasion mentioned by S. Matthew (xxviii. 16) when our Lord gave His disciples the command to baptize and teach. How many witnesses of the Resurrection were thus provided by God. It was nearly thirty years since, and yet there were hundreds of persons still alive when S. Paul wrote this letter, who had seen and conversed with their Master after He returned from the grave.

7. After that, he was seen of James; then of all the apostles.

This was apparently "James, the Lord's brother," who lived at Jerusalem as Bishop, and was related to our Saviour Himself; and the appearance to all the apostles was that at the Ascension. Think what this sight was to our Saviour's friends. They had followed His steps for so long, had given up all for Him, His Word had pierced their hearts; then they had seen Him die in agony and shame, now He was with them again full of life and power. This great sight strengthened them to subdue the world.

8. And last of all he was seen of me also, as of one born out of due time. 9. For I am the least of the apostles, that am not

meet to be called an apostle, because I persecuted the church of God.

What am I that I should enjoy the blessings of the gospel, should find Christ our Lord at His Altar, should be able to rely on the promises of heaven? S. Paul wondered that he had been allowed to see Christ glorified after all that he had done to blaspheme that Holy Name. I wonder with more reason why I who have been such as I have been should be allowed such moments of peace, such glorious hopes, nay, be called to work for Christ now. The wonders of God's mercy are indeed infinite.

10. *But by the grace of God I am what I am: and his grace which was bestowed upon me was not in vain; but I laboured more abundantly than they all: yet not I, but the grace of God which was with me.*

All good comes of God's grace; our first call to believe, good thoughts and plans of work for Him, anything undertaken or persevered in, what we do here and hope for hereafter, all is of Him out of ourselves. Vanity and barrenness, empty pride or vile temptations are all that grow of themselves in our heart. Lord, open my eyes that I may see my own nothingness, and Thy glory and power; my own great weakness will be renewed and changed by that sight.

11. *Therefore whether it were I or they, so we preach, and so ye believed.*

The Holy Catholic Faith is one, and rests on the Death and Resurrection of Christ our Lord. The message of the Church, the voice of teachers, the hope of Christians, used all to be one. Lord, let this be so again, overwhelm our many divisions with a sense of the one God Whom we worship and love, of the one Death that has redeemed, of the one Spirit that sanctifies. Let the time come again when Christian ministers shall all speak this same message with power.

12. *Now if Christ be preached that he rose from the dead, how say some among you that there is no resurrection of the dead?*

Some persons at Corinth lost the hope of a resurrection from the dead; they said, "Let us die to sin and lead a new life, that is the Resurrection;" they said, "This body turns to dust and is done with, no hope of that ever appearing again;" but S. Paul says "it is part of our Faith to believe that the Son of Mary rose again. There would be no gospel at all unless one Sacred Body had risen to life on that first Easter Day."

13. *But if there be no resurrection of the dead, then is Christ not risen: 14. and if Christ be not risen, then is our preaching vain, and your faith is also vain.*

If Christ did not rise, then what became of His words, of His prayers, of His intrusting His Holy Soul to His Father's Hands? He was then deceived Himself, and He deceived His friends too. Then Caiaphas, and Pilate, and Herod, were right and the Holy Jesus was wrong. Take this thought well into your heart; be sure that if purity, and love, and truth mean anything, then the grave was not the end of Jesus, it was but the passage for Him into a new life; and so it is not our end, we too can look beyond it.

15. *Yea, and we are found false witnesses of God; because we have testified of God that he raised up Christ: whom he raised not up, if so be that the dead rise not.*

The apostles do not look like false witnesses. They gave up all, they endured such dangers, wrought such marvels; in all they said and did appears honest conviction, they staked their all on this truth. What can be more sincere, convincing, and straightforward than their testimony? let us too, as believers did in those days, accept joyfully what they say, and prove its truth by our own trial of it.

16. *For if the dead rise not, then is not Christ raised: 17. and if Christ be not raised, your faith is vain; ye are yet in your sins.*

Unless the Lord Jesus rose again, what hope have we of pardon, or of holiness? The gospel tells us that our sins are forgiven, that the Precious Blood can cleanse us, that however vile we have been, however we are now weighed down by evil, yet God offers us pardon and new life. This is the message that has changed the world, and given hope to countless souls; we see its power every day, yet all this is a dream unless our Lord overcame death.

18. *Then they also which are fallen asleep in Christ are perished.*

Here is the witness of the holy dead; they in their lifetime chose the right side, fought against sin, followed after love and holiness, and died in this faith; shall we say that they were fools? Yet unless eternal life proves them right, all those who preferred the pleasures of sin may triumph over them.

19. *If in this life only we have hope in Christ, we are of all men most miserable.*

If there were no hereafter, then what profit in church-going, and prayer, and self-denial? Why should we then keep from any pleasure or profit that is in our reach? Think, if the grave were all, how unbearable pain and decay would be, how hopeless our partings, how mean and narrow our lives! but, thank God, we look for something beyond.

20. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the firstfruits of them that slept.

The firstfruits were the first sheaf of the harvest, which was offered to God as a sign that all the harvest was His, and to bring His blessing upon the rest. Christ's Risen Body is this sheaf; it was offered to God as a pledge that He will remember us, and raise us up also. Christians are dear to God, though dead and forgotten by men. Soon will come the Harvest-time; one sheaf has already been reaped for immortality.

21. For since by man came death, by man came also the resurrection of the dead. 22. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive.

We see Death all around, we feel it within us, all Adam's children have this sentence given against them; yet there is a life within which Death cannot touch. Christ our Lord gives to His servants a faith, a hope, a love, that are proof against death. All in us that comes from Adam must die, but believers inherit from Christ what is much more precious, and will live for ever.

23. But every man in his own order: Christ the firstfruits; afterward they that are Christ's at his coming.

Faith looks onward and rejoices in the prospect of Christ's coming; all the time that has passed since He rose from the dead will then seem but a moment. Let us take courage to work for God, and pray, and overcome evil. What does all else matter so long as we are found on Christ's side when He calls us. The Resurrection was begun by His rising; soon God will continue and extend it to us.

24. Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power.

Can our Lord's Kingdom end? In this sense only, that in heaven will be no more enemies, no more struggles, no more wants; means of grace will have passed away, suffering will be over, we shall be in God's Presence and see His glory. Jesus our Lord will

always be God and man, our Friend and Lord, the Light of all creation, but all the Church militant which is now His Kingdom will be gone, for its work will be done.

25. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. 26. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death.

Satan, sin, and death are still mighty ; we see every day what fierce enemies they are, and yet our Master is mightier. He can rescue us from their grasp now, and one day bring their power to an end. Lord, keep us from ever betraying Thee, and going over to Thy enemies. We are Thy soldiers, and will remain faithful to Thee.

27. For he hath put all things under his feet. But when he saith all things are put under him, it is manifest that he is excepted, which did put all things under him. 28. And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all.

God will put all things under Christ at last ; those who have not known His glory shall confess it then, yet He will not retain it for Himself, but yield it up to His heavenly Father. The Church will remain in its results only, the multitudes of glorified souls who have been prepared for eternity in it while it lasted. God grant we may so use all the means of grace that He allows us here, as to be able to do without them there. If God is to be all in all, and even Christ's Altar and Throne to disappear in that glory, what will become of me if I have not subjected my will to His? Communion with God is the end of man ; let me choose quiet moments to remember that.

29. Else what shall they do which are baptized for the dead, if the dead rise not at all ? why are they then baptized for the dead ?

It would seem to have been a practice in those days that when a person who was preparing for Baptism and earnestly desiring it chanced to die suddenly before he could be baptized, some friend came forward to receive Baptism in his name and for his sake, believing it would profit his friend though he was dead. Indeed this was superstitious, but it showed how Christians believed that love and faith went on beyond the grave. Death cannot destroy the union of hearts that believe.

30. And why stand we in jeopardy every hour ? 31. I protest by your rejoicing which I have in Christ Jesus our Lord, I die daily.

This was a venture which Christians have made ; they staked their all on there being a life to come, they willingly put aside honour and comfort and ease, they chose to be despised and outcasts, nay, to be burnt or thrown to wild beasts, and all this because they knew that in the world to come God would over-abundantly repay them. I wish my faith was strong enough to give up the present for the future, I am too apt to choose the present pleasure and forget the glories of heaven.

32. If after the manner of men I have fought with beasts at Ephesus, what advantageth it me, if the dead rise not ? let us eat and drink ; for to morrow we die.

By fighting wild beasts S. Paul means that he had to strive with fierce enemies, and run constant dangers. Why should he live thus unless in the hope of immortality ? Once give up that hope and we become like brutes, fit only to graze and pair, and seize all the provender we can get. One who believes in everlasting life reverses this selfish motto, and says, "Let us pray, let us follow after good works, live in charity and patience, for to-morrow we die, and then comes Eternity."

33. Be not deceived : evil communications corrupt good manners.

Many pure and tender souls have lost their faith or innocence through listening to foolish talk. When you hear blasphemies, or scoffs, or when vice is spoken of as a joke, then beware ; entreat God to keep you from ever speaking thus. Perhaps the worst blasphemers now were believers once. God keep us from falling away as they have done.

34. Awake to righteousness, and sin not ; for some have not the knowledge of God : I speak this to your shame.

To deny a life to come would be to mistake God's character. How can He be just and holy if this world is all ? In those moments when we live for God, and seek to rise above ourselves, we are firm believers in the Resurrection ; it is our baser desires, our vainer hours that drag us down into doubt.

35. But some man will say, How are the dead raised up ? and with what body do they come ?

What power can make dust live again ? what kind of body can that be that will have no wants, feel no pain, never get worn out or injured ? Nay, God's power is able to work any change, and immortal life is more than we can understand as yet ; it is true that according to our notions it is impossible, but then our notions are only drawn from the short experience of this narrow world.

36. Thou fool, that which thou sowest is not quickened, except it die : 37. and that which thou sowest, thou sowest not that body that shall be, but bare grain, it may chance of wheat, or of some other grain : 38. but God giveth it a body as it hath pleased him, and to every seed his own body.

The fields and gardens show us life continuing through apparent death, lost in the ground for a while, and then rising up in new beauty. We sowed our seeds ; they seemed dry and dead, so we buried them in the earth, and now look what tall stems, what green leaves, what rich flowers have come up ! Who shall limit God's power for His nobler creatures if He thus changes seeds that cannot feel or understand ?

39. All flesh is not the same flesh : but there is one kind of flesh of men, another flesh of beasts, another of fishes, and another of birds. 40. There are also celestial bodies, and bodies terrestrial : but the glory of the celestial is one, and the glory of the terrestrial is another.

There are endless varieties in things that we see ; those who have studied God's creatures will tell us of their many orders, and what distinguishes each from each. Now, do we think He has exhausted all His power ? Cannot His wisdom devise a fit frame for the undying spirit when He calls it back to earth again ? God's creation is infinitely marvellous, we see but a tiny corner of it here ; we shall see one day what other marvels He is able to work for those who trust Him.

41. There is one glory of the sun, and another glory of the moon, and another glory of the stars : for one star differeth from another star in glory.

Light is the same in itself, God's first creature, the most swift, most beautiful, most far-reaching of all, and yet how it differs in its different spheres. Sunlight, moonlight, starlight, nay, the rays of each particular star, have their differences. So, too, the inward light of grace, and the future rays of perfect glory have their degrees and characters in each soul.

42. So also is the resurrection of the dead. It is sown in corruption ; it is raised in incorruption : 43. it is sown in dishonour ; it is raised in glory : it is sown in weakness ; it is raised in power :

Death is the sowing-time ; it will come soon to us, but we fear it not, we trust ourselves to the wise Gardener's care. Nor are we

frightened by the hideous aspect of corruption, for we know God is able to give us a body worth much more than that which we lose, a body which decay and pain will never touch. Even over the open grave we can sing “Alleluia.”

44. *It is sown a natural body ; it is raised a spiritual body. There is a natural body, and there is a spiritual body.*
 45. *And so it is written, The first man Adam was made a living soul ; the last Adam was made a quickening spirit.*

The natural body which God made for Adam at the Creation is fit for this life's needs and duties ; it grows and decays, is nourished, feels warmth or cold, reproduces its kind ; but Christ our Lord shows us something in man which requires a better clothing than that. Immortal love, perfect holiness, a spirit knit to God's Spirit, will be lodged in a body like that of our Risen Saviour, fit for the life of heaven.

46. *Howbeit that was not first which is spiritual, but that which is natural ; and afterward that which is spiritual.*

Adam came first, Christ afterwards. The child comes first, then the grown man ; so, too, the earthly body now, the spiritual body hereafter. God's law is that we rise from the lower to the higher life. We are but in our infancy as compared with the prospects of eternity. Only remember always—

“What here is faithfully begun
Will be completed, not undone.”

47. *The first man is of the earth, earthly : the second man is the Lord from heaven.* 48. *As is the earthly, such are they also that are earthly : and as is the heavenly, such are they also that are heavenly.* 49. *And as we have borne the image of the earthly, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly.*

Not only am I like Adam in my earthly nature, but I have copied too faithfully his sin and downfall. Lord, let me gaze upon the glorious image of Thy dear Son, Who is my Head and Example, and by contemplating Him, let me regain a heavenly character. In Baptism I took His likeness upon me ; what purity, what tenderness, what reverence such a calling requires ! only His Divine power can new fashion body and soul.

50. *Now this I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God ; neither doth corruption inherit incorruption.*

A Christian counts peacefully the progress of that decay which will set him free from this dying body. He knows that he must lose this before he can gain something much better. Flesh and blood must turn to dust, corruption to corruption; but love and faith never die, they lay hold on everlasting life, and look for a new habitation there. Dear Lord, at times I find it hard to part from flesh and blood; they are my old companions, and I have given way to them too much. Give me a strong hope of immortality that will raise me up higher.

51. Behold, I shew you a mystery; We shall not all sleep, but we shall all be changed, 52. in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trump: for the trumpet shall sound, and the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we shall be changed.

The change from this world to that which is to come-will be suddenly, and in a moment. What a change it will be! full only of terror to some, full also of trembling hope to others. The trumpet will sound for God's final victory over sin, and the gathering together of His faithful people. Death's sleep will be over, and our eyes open on the eternal world. Lord, change me here by Thy Holy Spirit, renew my inner life, that when the last trump sounds my body too may be ready to receive Thy gift of glory.

53. For this corruptible must put on incorruption, and this mortal must put on immortality.

This very body which I wear, which throbs with pain and trembles with weakness, is designed by God to live for ever in a new condition of freedom and joy. Woe to me if I profane it with lust or self-indulgence, and so unfit it for that high destiny. How God can renew a decaying body and fill it with perfect life is beyond my power to understand, but I rest on His Word. He made and redeemed us, and so can do greater wonders still.

54. So when this corruptible shall have put on incorruption, and this mortal shall have put on immortality, then shall be brought to pass the saying that is written, Death is swallowed up in victory.

Dear friend, fight now, that you may share in the victory then. Christ's victorious soldiers will then be able to hear and tell how they each by their Master's help overcame in the fight. Evil men, and evil thoughts, and pain, and the terrors of death, seem dreadful enemies now, but then they will all lie prostrate and be able to hurt us no more.

55. O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?

We cannot yet triumph over death, we have still to fight with him, and feel his sharp sting ; only on the Resurrection day shall we feel that he is gone for ever ; but faith looks onward to that day and anticipates its triumph. Death indeed is mighty now, but Jesus our Lord is mightier, and will rescue His friends from that great foe. He has done with death, and we shall by His mercy leave it behind us too.

56. The sting of death is sin; and the strength of sin is the law.

There is the poison of Death's sting, our sins ; but for those we should not need to fear dying. That makes the misery of death, to feel that we have wilfully broken God's Holy Law and made it an adversary against us. God's holiness rebukes our many transgressions. To whom can we fly for refuge in that hour ?

57. But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ.

Glory be to God, we have an Advocate Who can gain our cause. However many and grievous are our sins, yet Christ's Sacrifice can prevail to blot them out. He bore the sharpness of death that we might feel it less. His Agony and Bloody Sweat, His Cross and Passion, His glorious Resurrection and Ascension are my charm with which I meet the monster and make him powerless.

58. Therefore, my beloved brethren, be ye stedfast, unmoveable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, forasmuch as ye know that your labour is not in vain in the Lord.

These great hopes should make me sober and diligent. Heaven is my home and God my Father ; therefore I will live a steady and upright life, standing firm against temptation, and doing the Lord's work as I best can, for I know that He will one day over-abundantly reward me. I cast away willingly some of the bright pleasures and rich rewards of this life, for I know my God has something much better, His true and eternal joy. What are the petty pleasures which fools boast of compared with inward peace, and heaven to come ?

CHAPTER XVI.

1. He exhorteth them to relieve the want of the brethren at Jerusalem.
 10. Commendeth Timothy, 13. and after friendly admonitions, 16.
 shutteth up his epistle with divers salutations.

NOW concerning the collection for the saints, as I have given order to the churches of Galatia, even so do ye.

Faith binds the world together. Christians in Corinth and in Galatia were touched with the distress of their brethren the Jewish Christians, and sought how they might relieve it. God give us hearts to feel for suffering ; it is only allowed by Him in His world in order to draw out compassion in us. The saints at Jerusalem were in deep poverty and under persecution, but God was stirring up day by day believers in other countries to send them help.

2. Upon the first day of the week let every one of you lay by him in store, as God hath prospered him, that there be no gatherings when I come.

Alms should be given on a plan, not be the chance indulgence of feeling ; it is not true charity to lavish money on any beggar who comes along the road, but it is true charity to deny ourselves constantly that we may have the pleasure of helping a good object. Give up a pleasure, do without a luxury, order your life on a saving plan, and you will be able every week to spare something for God, for His Church, for His poor. How great is His condescension Who is pleased to accept our humble offerings !

3. And when I come, whomsoever ye shall approve by your letters, them will I send to bring your liberality unto Jerusalem.

4. And if it be meet that I go also, they shall go with me.

How careful S. Paul was to avoid misunderstandings ! He did not say, "Trust me with the money," but told them to appoint their own stewards, and that he would follow out their wishes in all things. Too often we are indignant at the notion of any suspicion ; we require to be trusted, and like to have everything in our own hands. The true Christian temper is humble and distrusts self. It is a blessing not to be responsible for much money ; how hard it is to administer it well !

5. Now I will come unto you, when I shall pass through Macedonia : for I do pass through Macedonia. 6. And it may

be that I will abide, yea, and winter with you, that ye may bring me on my journey whithersoever I go.

We read in Acts xx. 1-3, how S. Paul carried out these plans. He wrote from Macedonia his 2nd Epistle to the Corinthians, and from Corinth in the winter his Epistle to the Romans. All his life was devoted to the service of God. He went wherever souls were to be won for Him. How our comfortable lives are rebuked by those who now among the heathen endure every kind of hardship in order to preach the gospel, while we sit by our fireside !

7. For I will not see you now by the way; but I trust to tarry a while with you, if the Lord permit.

He waited a while to see what effect his words would have. This Epistle has sharp rebukes and wise reasonings ; the apostle desired all this to sink into his friends' hearts, and then he would come and see what it had done. He longed to see the souls whom he had converted, and tell them of God's fresh mercies and victories, and this would require some leisure. God grant us to have friends who can share in our religious joy and work for a common Lord, that is the best friendship.

8. But I will tarry at Ephesus until Pentecost. 9. For a great door and effectual is opened unto me, and there are many adversaries.

Work and danger kept him at Ephesus. He stayed there just because all was not smooth. God, he knew, had opened the door, and not all the opposition of Satan could close it. God mercifully opens doors for His Word to penetrate. He can make a way where human foresight can see none. Let us take courage to go the way that He points us, and no adversaries can do us harm.

10. Now if Timotheus come, see that he may be with you without fear: for he worketh the work of the Lord, as I also do. 11. Let no man therefore despise him: but conduct him forth in peace, that he may come unto me: for I look for him with the brethren.

The apostle took care for individuals. He was not one of those persons who speak or write well about the duty of loving mankind, but are very selfish when it comes to loving particular persons. No, he thought of each one of his fellow-workers and knew their needs. He desired that Timotheus, who was young, should find friends, encouragement, and sympathy, at Corinth. He bade Christians there treat him with respect and help him on his way.

In these days when our young men start in great cities, far from their home, may God raise them up some kind friends to support and help them.

12. As touching our brother Apollos, I greatly desired him to come unto you with the brethren : but his will was not at all to come at this time ; but he will come when he shall have convenient time.

How free S. Paul was from jealousy ! Apollos was eloquent, mighty in the Scriptures, fervent in spirit, and had immense influence at Corinth, yet the apostle did not suspect his loyalty. He desired him to go to Corinth, and that the Corinthians should love and trust him. When shall I have this spirit of hearty admiration for others' gifts, and rejoice in their being trusted and loved rather than myself ? S. Paul said, "Apollos is your good friend, he will come to you soon ; have no suspicion about his goodwill."

13. Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong.

"Onward, Christian soldiers,
Marching as to war."

It is not a time of peace ; enemies and dangers are near ; what will happen to the soldier who sleeps at his post, who quits his ranks, who yields and faints ? Soldiering implies hot marches, heavy loads, sharp skirmishes. Lord, let me open my eyes and see my enemies, and yet trust in Thy ready help.

14. Let all your things be done with charity.

Charity is the best guide all through life ; it should accompany our prayers, our words, our work ; it should wake and go to rest with us. Let us, whatever changes come, cling fast to it, and so be at peace within. Nothing can hurt us if we but keep a loving heart. When age, and sickness, and troubles come, they must not rob us of this precious treasure.

15. I beseech you, brethren, (ye know the house of Stephanas, that it is the firstfruits of Achaia, and that they have addicted themselves to the ministry of the saints,) 16. that ye submit yourselves unto such, and to every one that helpeth with us, and laboureth.

Submission to those whom God has set over us, and especially to those who minister in holy things, is often enjoined in the Bible. What if they are frail and liable to error, yet let us help them to bear their burden, forward their plans for good ; beware of sneering

at their persons or sermons. How hateful is an upstart temper that is always setting every one else right and laying down the law to them !

17. I am glad of the coming of Stephanas and Fortunatus and Achaicus : for that which was lacking on your part they have supplied. 18. For they have refreshed my spirit and yours : therefore acknowledge ye them that are such.

How good is God to refresh us by the kindness of dear friends ! We should be grateful to them and to Him for those loving words and helpful acts by which we are cheered as we walk through this world's wilderness. God keep us from an ungrateful spirit ; let us not meet kind hearts with a cold selfish behaviour. If we do this we may at last wear out their love and miss it only too late.

19. The churches of Asia salute you. Aquila and Priscilla salute you much in the Lord, with the church that is in their house.

Aquila and Priscilla had a room in their house where Christians met for prayer. All those Christians who used to meet there sent their remembrances, their tender sympathy, their assurance of a common faith to the Church at Corinth. Let us who believe in and love Jesus Christ consider ourselves thus, as a few knit together by faith in the midst of an unbelieving world, and so be drawn together.

20. All the brethren greet you. Greet ye one another with an holy kiss.

Alas that a kiss, which is a sign of pure and tender love, should be sometimes an empty form, sometimes the expression of impure, deadly passion ! It expresses the union of two hearts ; let ours be always true and tender, that we may love the souls whom God has given us in and for Him. As pure love is the holiest thing there is, and most like God, so unclean passion is His deadliest enemy, and drags us away from Him to be under Satan's dominion.

21. The salutation of me Paul with mine own hand. 22. If any man love not the Lord Jesus Christ, let him be Anathema Maran-atha.

This grave warning rouses our cold hearts. Lord, how can I tell if I love Thee ? and yet, if I do not, I lose all the benefits of Thy work. Those who do not love Christ will tremble at His awful coming. When I consider the great beauty of His life, the love and sufferings of His Death, the holy words He spoke, His deal-

ings with me in His Church, His heavenly and life-giving Presence bestowed on faith at His Altar, I must be duller than lead if I cannot find a spark of love for Him.

23. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you

"O Grace, that workest miracles
Upon the hearts of men!"

O gift freely and bountifully poured out by the great King on His unworthy servants, I remain humbly expecting thy fulness. I have no love or holiness of my own ; all that is good in me must be through the favour of my merciful Lord. Grace means strength, and mercy, and purity, and love. I need these all my life through.

24. My love be with you all in Christ Jesus. Amen.

Love burns so bright that no distance of place, or length of time, nor faults, nor griefs, can put it out. When we get old, let this still glow within us and keep off the winter's frost. Those whom we have loved for Christ's sake and as members of His Body must always be dear to us ; if we love Him, we cannot give them quite up or forget them.

*THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL
THE APOSTLE TO THE
CORINTHIANS.*

CHAPTER I.

3. The apostle encourageth them against troubles, by the comforts and deliverances which God had given him, as in all his afflictions, 8. so particularly in his late danger in Asia. 12. And calling both his own conscience and their's to witness of his sincere manner of preaching the immutable truth of the gospel, 15. he excuseth his not coming to them, as proceeding not of lightness, but of his lenity towards them.

PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timothy our brother, unto the church of God which is at Corinth, with all the saints which are in all Achaia: 2. grace be to you and peace from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

S. Paul desired for his friends grace within and peace without, grace to strengthen them and peace to comfort them ; what better blessings can we have or desire ? We may be content to lose much else if these two gifts are still ours. God is our Father ; that thought disposes us to love, to thankfulness, to trust in His goodness. Jesus is our Lord, and therefore to be obeyed and followed.

3. *Blessed be God, even the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, and the God of all comfort;*

We know of God as a God of power, and wisdom, and holiness, but perhaps this beautiful title "The Father of mercies and God of all comfort" has never yet been brought home to us, it is taught us by suffering. God is pleased to take away sunshine from us, and then we see the stars of heaven. He becomes ours more truly then than in the joyful hours of life ; we understand the full meaning of this Divine attribute.

4. Who comforteth us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God.

Here is a great profit of suffering, we become able to comfort others. God leads us perhaps through a valley of tears ; we have agony of body, darkness of mind, bereavement ; why is all this ? At least for this reason, to give us tender, kind, feeling hearts, and power to point afflicted souls to God's mercy, which we have ourselves laid hold off. If we would minister to sorrow, we must ourselves have known it and learnt its bitter yet gracious lessons.

5. For as the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also aboundeth by Christ.

Christ Himself suffered; it is not strange therefore that His members should be in the same condition. He knew what it was to be deserted, to be in darkness, to bear the Cross ; so when all this comes on us we do not marvel, suffering is not an unnatural condition for a Christian. But He was sustained, He overcame, He entered into joy, His sufferings brought about victory ; so after our measure let it be with us ; we see how

“In His parting breath
Love masters agony.”

6. And whether we be afflicted, it is for your consolation and salvation, which is effectual in the enduring of the same sufferings which we also suffer : or whether we be comforted, it is for your consolation and salvation. 7. And our hope of you is stedfast, knowing, that as ye are partakers of the sufferings, so shall ye be also of the consolation.

These were loving hearts which shared sorrows and joys amongst each other. What will break up our selfishness and give us such a tender interest in our brethren's cares and hopes ? I am deeply ashamed to think how selfish I am : at my daily prayers I scarce give a thought to the temptations, the tears, the anxieties, the loneliness of so many whom I know well ; and yet God meant me to feel for them and with them.

8. For we would not, brethren, have you ignorant of our trouble which came to us in Asia, that we were pressed out of measure, above strength, insomuch that we despaired even of life.

Here is a brave soldier almost overthrown ; how can we poor frail disciples hope to stand ? Whether it was the savage cries of enraged enemies seeking for his life (Acts xix. 32), or whether it was

illness and pain, or the fret of many cares, so it was, that the apostle's soul had fainted in him ; he felt there was no way for him but to die ; body and mind seemed alike overburdened. When such hours come to Christians, as to their Divine Master in Gethsemane, let them take comfort by thinking of the Lord and His Saints who have had the same experience.

9. But we had the sentence of death in ourselves, that we should not trust in ourselves, but in God which raiseth the dead :

In the prospect of immediate death all things human fade away, strong arm, quick brain, well-filled purse, are then all seen to be dust and ashes, we are ourselves alone with God. Glory be to His mercy, which sometimes brings us down face to face with the grave, and then sends us back again to life for awhile that we may use that experience which we have gone through. What have we of our own to trust to ? power and wisdom are in God only.

10. Who delivered us from so great a death, and doth deliver : in whom we trust that he will yet deliver us ;

Our chief hindrance in the way of salvation is our confidence in ourselves. We believe ourselves to be wise, and strong, and pure, and able to get along very well. God in His great mercy takes our case in hand, makes us feel our own absolute frailty, the nearness of death, the nothingness of man, so that out of these sharp lessons may grow a humble trust in Him, not in ourselves any more. What can hurt us now, when so mighty a Friend is ever with us ?

11. Ye also helping together by prayer for us, that for the gift bestowed upon us by the means of many persons thanks may be given by many on our behalf.

God's mercy is the source of our blessings, and yet our friends' prayers are the channel to bring these blessings down to us. Let us not despise any one's prayers ; it is a great comfort to feel that others plead for us before God, and thank Him for His goodness to us. When I tremble at the desperate coldness and poverty of my own prayers, let me by faith link them on to the more earnest intercessions which many loving souls make daily.

12. For our rejoicing is this, the testimony of our conscience, that in simplicity and godly sincerity, not with fleshly wisdom, but by the grace of God, we have had our conversation in the world, and more abundantly to you-ward.

Nothing is so powerful against all the windings of deceit as a simple and straightforward character ; and this not merely of nature,

but springing out of a daily converse with God. How poor and mean are the world's tricks and devices, plots to obtain a high place, a little pleasure, a small advantage ! and for this men abase themselves to scheme and lie. Meanwhile a Christian takes God for his end, the Gospel for his road, and what God sends for his portion. He is the same whether in prosperous or adverse days, and so all trust him.

13. For we write none other things unto you, than what ye read or acknowledge ; and I trust ye shall acknowledge even to the end ; 14. as also ye have acknowledged us in part, that we are your rejoicing, even as ye also are our's in the day of the Lord Jesus.

S. Paul's acts and letters were all of a piece, he had no fear of appealing from one to the other. When men came to understand him they found that his whole longing was for their good, that they and he might alike come to stand on the right hand of Christ and share eternal joys. How we shall rejoice at that day in those who have brought about our salvation by their wise counsels ; how we shall thank God for them, and they in turn will rejoice in us !

15. And in this confidence I was minded to come unto you before, that ye might have a second benefit ; 16. and to pass by you into Macedonia, and to come again out of Macedonia unto you, and of you to be brought on my way toward Judea.

The apostle had changed his plan and gone straight to Macedonia (Acts xx. 1) instead of sailing for Corinth first, as he had once promised to do. He gave up the idea of two visits, and only paid one ; yet he had not been insincere, but altered his mind with much thought and prayer, and for his friends' greater good. It is possible to make an idol of mere consistency. God teaches us new things every day ; let our hearts be open to seek His Will daily, and fulfil it when known.

17. When I therefore was thus minded, did I use lightness ? or the things that I purpose, do I purpose according to the flesh, that with me there should be yea yea, and nay nay ?

God keep us from caprice, and give us a quiet and steady mind, which looks to Christ, and so is safely anchored even amidst a hundred different gusts of wind. Let our motive not be the flesh, that is, not self, self with its idle vanity, love of ease, changing fancies, but God's Will as set forth in Christ Jesus.

18. But as God is true, our word toward you was not yea and nay. 19. For the Son of God, Jesus Christ, who was preached

among you by us, even by me and Silvanus and Timotheus, was not yea and nay, but in him was yea.

In the life of Christ our Saviour on earth, in the message S. Paul delivered about Him, in the Church's Creed ever since, there is nothing fickle or changeable, all is clear and of a piece. May I in my life be a faithful and true witness after the pattern of Christ and His Saints; may I teach Christ's truth in my words and example, and so win others to serve the same Master.

20. *For all the promises of God in him are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God by us.*

In Christ's work God is shown to be true. His ancient promises are fulfilled, His attributes manifested, the desires and instincts of our own hearts met. Glory be to God for the many crowns which He has set on the Head of Christ our Lord. Who else is there in whom the foretellings of all the ages meet? Let us in speaking of religion seek God's glory, not our own; perish any thought of showing off ourselves when the infinite splendour and abundant treasures of our great Lord are to be displayed.

21. *Now he which establisheth us with you in Christ, and hath anointed us, is God;*

Prove us, Lord, to be Thine, sanctify us with Thy grace. We desire no other service, but yet we fear our own frailty. Thou didst open the apostle's mouth to speak, and guide his pen to write, and in like manner Thy gifts are still open to us. Thou givest faith, inclinest the will, orderest the life of Thy chosen; let us experience this sure establishing, this sweet anointing.

22. *Who hath also sealed us, and given the earnest of the Spirit in our hearts.*

"Come, Holy Ghost, our souls inspire,
And lighten with celestial fire."

Thy grace is a seal marking us out now and setting us apart from the ungodly, and also an earnest or deposit which God makes to give us a taste of that infinite treasure which this life cannot contain. Keep me, Lord, from deadly sin, which will break Thy seal, and throw away Thy deposit of heavenly joy.

23. *Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.*

He would not go to Corinth, where he had meant to go, because of the pain which he should have given them, and they him. Their faults pierced his heart, he had grave words of rebuke ready for

them. He would have expelled some from the Christian Church, or forbidden them to come to the Lord's Table. All this would have been so grievous to them and to himself, that he waited in the hope of better things. He had the great gift of a tender heart to which the sufferings of brethren are as its own, and this was how he did them good.

24. Not for that we have dominion over your faith, but are helpers of your joy : for by faith ye stand.

Thank God that no one but Himself has dominion over our faith. We have no infallible Head on earth ; here we are all fellow-servants, alike fed by God's grace, alike studying His truth, alike helping one another along the road to heaven. Our consciences are free ; not that we proudly reject God's ordinances, or His ministers, or wise advice, or the Church's blessing ; still we stand each of us alone before God, and have direct access to His Throne.

CHAPTER II.

1. Having shewed the reason why he came not to them, 6. he requireth them to forgive and to comfort that excommunicated person, 10. even as himself also upon his true repentance had forgiven him, 12. declaring withal why he departed from Troas to Macedonia, 14. and the happy success which God gave to his preaching in all places.

BUT *I determined this with myself, that I would not come again to you in heaviness.*

What would have caused him heaviness ? To find sin unrebuked, strife and discord, unworthy communicants, scoffers at God's truth. My grief, I fear, is very seldom of this kind. I grieve when my vanity is touched, my body anguished, my comfort interfered with. Lord, give me eyes of faith, that I may see and grieve over the evil that there is round me, and do my best to remove it.

2. For if I make you sorry, who is he then that maketh me glad, but the same which is made sorry by me ? 3. And I wrote this same unto you, lest, when I came, I should have sorrow from them of whom I ought to rejoice ; having confidence in you all, that my joy is the joy of you all.

How wisely S. Paul dealt with offenders ! first he wrote sharply to rebuke them, warning that he would come with severity ; then he delayed his coming, waiting for their amendment, and shrinking

from sharp measures ; meanwhile he prayed for them constantly. Then he wrote a second letter telling them how glad he was to hear of their improvement, and that he knew well their hearts and his were all one. This is like the good Samaritan, who used both oil and vinegar to the poor traveller's bruises. How ready we are to trust entirely to rebuke, and forget the love and prayers that should go with it !

4. For out of much affliction and anguish of heart I wrote unto you with many tears ; not that ye should be grieved, but that ye might know the love which I have more abundantly unto you.

He wrote the First Epistle with much grief ; in parts where he spoke of sins and abuses prevailing he had to stop for tears, and this was the secret of its good effect, the writer's heart went with it. Lord, give Thy ministers hearts like this, that they may feel keenly the disorders of Thy Church. This is more worthy of sorrow, that the Church should be powerless and souls on the way to ruin, than most of the losses which upset us so much.

5. But if any have caused grief, he hath not grieved me, but in part : that I may not overcharge you all. 6. Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. 7. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow.

The sinner spoken of in 1 Corinthians v. had been publicly reprobated and shut out from Christian communion. This severity had made him see his fault and repent of it, so that he now sought earnestly for absolution and restoration. This is the right way to deal with sin, not to refine it away, but to show its horror and foulness, and God's wrath against it, and yet to leave a door of mercy open, through which Christ's Cross can be seen. Deadly sin is hateful to God, and deserves punishment, but yet when we repent Christ's Blood can wash away all stains.

8. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him.

The evil-doer had now repented ; he is now again a brother beloved, they should absolve him and treat him as one of their own body again. This tenderness would make him feel God's love and mercy, that is a precious privilege of forgiveness ; the heart that has been so guilty and so wretched dares to say, "They love me again, may I not hope that God forgives and loves me too ?" So the Church's absolution brings home God's pardoning mercy to the soul.

9. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things.

Give me, Lord, an obedient heart, if my place is to obey ; and if I have the more dangerous task of ruling over my brethren, let it be in the apostle's spirit of sympathy and courtesy. He always commanded charity first, and showed it in his own dealings.

10. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also ; for if I forgave any thing, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ ;

As the sentence (1 Cor. v. 4, 5) was given in the Name of Christ, so is the remission. Christ is the one true Priest and King ; it is in His Person that the Church condemns or pardons. His words are the rule by which Christians judge. O Lord, be so with Thy ministers in their dealings with souls that they may only blame or pardon in exact accordance with Thy truth. Let them never utter a hasty sentence which the sin has not deserved, nor a light remission on the hardened and unrepentant.

11. Lest Satan should get an advantage of us : for we are not ignorant of his devices.

Satan deceives sinners, first by making sin seem so easy, and next by making repentance seem so hard. His plan is to make the guilty soul despair of forgiveness. We ought to treat those who have fallen into any grave sin with a patient kindness, never making light of the evil, but still always pointing them hopefully to the great treasure of God's mercy which we have ourselves experienced. If Thou, Lord, shouldest be extreme to mark what is done amiss, what would have become of me ?

12. Furthermore, when I came to Troas to preach Christ's gospel, and a door was opened unto me of the Lord, 13. I had no rest in my spirit, because I found not Titus my brother : but taking my leave of them, I went from thence into Macedonia.

Though S. Paul could not stay at Troas this time, he came back there again next year in the Easter Week (Acts xx. 6). His Sunday there was marked by Holy Communion and by raising Eutychus to life. Why could he not stay there quietly this time and preach the Gospel ? all things seemed ready for him, and God Himself making a way for the work. No, he felt so anxious about his friends at Corinth ; he could not hear any news of them till Titus came ; he wondered if they had taken his sharp rebuke rightly, whether they had amended their disorders. I wish, in my selfish life, I ever felt unrest about my brethren's souls. Oh that

I could be truly anxious for those dear young friends whom I have seen start in the world, that I longed to hear of their religious welfare. I fear my rest is seldom disturbed by any other than selfish cares.

14. *Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of his knowledge by us in every place.*

Christ's triumph; what are the world's glories to that! Christ's sweet perfume; how faint or how rank all the world's pleasures smell by comparison! Glory to God, Who makes frail men share in the triumph of the Crucified, and themselves lead souls captive after Him along His royal road; Who supplies poor human hearts with a feeling of the exceeding sweetness of the gospel, which attracts them from all else, and makes them entice others to love the same perfume.

15. *For we are unto God a sweet savour of Christ, in them that are saved, and in them that perish: 16. to the one we are the savour of death unto death; and to the other the savour of life unto life. And who is sufficient for these things?*

What is health to some is poison to others. God's Word, and the Sacraments, and good books, and holy examples, and wise advice from friends, are all either for our good or our great harm. Grant me, Lord, not to turn to my own ruin the privileges which I enjoy. There have been many to whom confirmation, or communion, or Church services, or the religious teaching they had, only turned to their deeper condemnation. Unless I love Christ Jesus and live by His grace, I may get to hate Him, and be found among His enemies at the last day.

17. *For we are not as many, which corrupt the word of God: but as of sincerity, but as of God, in the sight of God speak we in Christ.*

If Christianity consisted in knowing the Bible, in church-going, in outward respectability, it would be easy to teach or practise it, but it has heights and depths beyond man's understanding. God's glory, Christ's Cross, a perfect standard of life, the presence of Christ at His Altar, the glories of heaven to come; who can rightly speak of all this? If I have to do so, let me speak in all sincerity; great issues hang on my words. God and angels listen to me. I cannot speak rightly but by God's grace.

CHAPTER III.

1. Lest their false teachers should charge him with vainglory, he sheweth the faith and graces of the Corinthians to be a sufficient commendation of his ministry. 6. Whereupon entering a comparison between the ministers of the law and of the gospel, 12. he prooveth that his ministry is so far the more excellent, as the gospel of life and liberty is more glorious than the law of condemnation.

DO we begin again to commend ourselves? or need we, as some others, epistles of commendation to you, or letters of commendation from you? 2. Ye are our epistle written in our hearts, known and read of all men:

This was one kind of letter. S. Paul carried his friends written in his heart; their case was constantly pleaded there with God; the apostle's tenderest wishes were for them. Lord, write on my heart the names of my dear family and friends; let me never become selfish and forgetful, and so rub the names out; let my daily prayers recall their needs to my mind. When this tie exists, it outlasts all the world's compliments.

3. Forasmuch as ye are manifestly declared to be the epistle of Christ ministered by us, written not with ink, but with the Spirit of the living God; not in tables of stone, but in fleshy tables of the heart.

This was another kind of letter. S. Paul wrote this on his friends' hearts, or rather Christ Jesus employed him as a mere pen with which His own Divine Hand wrote the letter. Hearts were the paper, grace the ink, Faith and Hope and Love were written down. Dear friends, we are all busy writing on others' hearts, all our teaching and example go to write everlasting lessons. Some there are whom Christ Jesus guides to write copies of holy teaching, others are in the devil's hands to write terrible copies that stain the soul for ever. Write we must, either for good or evil.

4. And such trust have we through Christ to God-ward: 5. not that we are sufficient of ourselves to think any thing as of ourselves; but our sufficiency is of God;

That I should have done good to any souls, printed Christ's truth in them, helped them on the heavenly road, is indeed most confounding to myself. I can see within me no capacity for good influences, nothing but a barren, uneasy vanity, a dead coldness, a proneness to all evil; but patience, it is God, not myself, Who

does the work. His might and love are pleased to employ even such instruments as I am. Let me in all honesty acknowledge the poverty of my own resources, and draw fresh supplies by prayer from His infinite mercy.

6. Who also hath made us able ministers of the new testament; not of the letter, but of the spirit: for the letter killeth, but the spirit giveth life.

Is my religion new and fresh, not an old and faded shadow of by-gone days? Does it have life from God's Spirit? Does it grow and increase with my years? It should be such if it is true. My Lord has left me not a mere Bible to be read, nor a mere outward Creed to be said, but a power which can renew my character after His own pattern. What does it profit me though I know all God's Word by heart, if I am not one of His true children? He bids me listen to His inward voice which speaks in silence.

7. But if the ministration of death, written and engraven in stones, was glorious, so that the children of Israel could not stedfastly behold the face of Moses for the glory of his countenance; which glory was to be done away: 8. how shall not the ministration of the spirit be rather glorious?

When Moses came down from the Mount after receiving the law his face shone for awhile; yet this soon vanished, it was but a momentary gleam, whereas the true light that Christ lights within lasts on and grows brighter with years. Even when all else is dark the believer has a light to walk by in the ways and words of Jesus, which all this dark foggy world cannot quite extinguish. To converse with God under the law illumined the face for awhile, but to meet Him daily in Christ Jesus transfigures even a commonplace character with a sweet and lasting radiance, which shines even in the mists of death.

9. For if the ministration of condemnation be glory, much more doth the ministration of righteousness exceed in glory.

The law was condemnation because it said only "Thou shalt" or "Thou shalt not;" it abounded with rules and ceremonies, but could scarcely touch the spiritual life; indeed it was full of glory, but terrible and severe. The gospel, on the other hand, brought pardon for sin, and a promise of grace; it speaks to the weak, trembling heart, gives it new life, reveals heavenly patterns, touches by the spell of the Cross. The law showed man how weak he is, and the gospel how strong Christ is to help him.

10. For even that which was made glorious had no glory in this respect, by reason of the glory that excelleth.

The moon is glorious, but looks pale and dim when sunshine returns ; so the law was a great revelation from Almighty God, and yet seemed very imperfect by contrast with Christ's work. We live in Gospel days ; let us take care that we live up to the opportunities which God gives us. Many earnest souls among Jews or among heathens longed earnestly for the teaching and the worship which we have among us, and yet prize so little.

i1. For if that which is done away was glorious, much more that which remaineth is glorious.

The law is done away ; there are no more literal Passovers or Sabbaths, the Temple is gone, the sacrifices are over, yet the real substance of all those outward ordinances remains in Christ's gospel. True love to God and man, the consecration of time and substance, of body, soul, and spirit, and this in union with the one perpetual offering which Christ our Lord made for us, all this lasts on and is unchangeable. This doctrine is quite out of the reach of any alterations that this world can bring.

i2. Seeing then that we have such hope, we use great plainness of speech :

Lord, give us this freedom ; let Thy truth shine upon our hearts, so that we may be set free from the deceits, the passions, the fear of this world, and may speak and act with courage, as becomes Thy soldiers. The thought of eternity makes the things of time less powerful to win our affections ; we look beyond.

i3. And not as Moses, which put a veil over his face, that the children of Israel could not stedfastly look to the end of that which is abolished :

The veil covered Moses' face, so that the Israelites could not mark how soon the glory vanished, but we may look all day upon Christ's glorious Face, which remains ever the same, and find no veil between Him and us. When we kneel down to pray, that Divine Face shines upon us in mercy.

i4. But their minds were blinded : for until this day remaineth the same veil untaken away in the reading of the old testament ; which veil is done away in Christ.

Jews heard the Old Testament read daily, but they stopped at the outward letter, and could not penetrate to the deep truths that lay beneath. The ceremonies, the types, the precepts remained always the same to them, while Christians learned from Christ Jesus the true lesson of the law ; it had done its work, and now was to pass into the gospel.

15. *But even unto this day, when Moses is read, the veil is upon their heart.*

If a Christian reads his Bible with a Jewish heart, trusting in his own righteousness for reward, in his own strength for overcoming temptation, forgetting the lessons of the Cross, there is a veil between him and the truth. There are many veiled hearts even in gospel times, many who do not see where they are, and what God would have them understand.

16. *Nevertheless when it shall turn to the Lord, the veil shall be taken away.*

When Moses went in before the Lord to speak with Him, he took the veil off. So when Moses' people turn to Christ Jesus and behold His Divine glory, then they see how the law has passed into the gospel ; the veil falls which had been set for awhile between them and the full truth. May my own sins not raise up that veil again between me and my Saviour, may I behave as in His manifest Presence, truthfully, purely, and reverently.

17. *Now the Lord is that Spirit : and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is liberty.*

The veil is gone which covered the Lawgiver's face, and the fear is gone with which the Israelites looked towards him. God's Spirit shows us full truth, and lifts up our hearts towards heaven. This is true liberty ; the world's followers are enslaved to their passions, their covetousness, their follies ; they try to drown the sense of bondage, but cannot forget it ; we, by God's mercy, will remain free.

18. *But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.*

The glory of Christ is to us what the glory of the Lord on Sinai was to Moses. By faith and prayer we catch some rays of it, and begin to reflect it ourselves ; the inward man is transfigured by faith in our Divine Lord. And we are not afraid of this vanishing away, as the splendour of Moses' face did ; no, this is a living glory, which grows brighter and brighter. How can men know we are Christ's unless our character reflects some rays of His holiness, love, and truth ?

CHAPTER IV.

1. He declareth how he hath used all sincerity and faithful diligence in preaching the gospel, 7. and how the troubles and persecutions which he daily endured for the same did redound to the praise of God's power, 12. to the benefit of the church, 16. and to the apostle's own eternal glory.

THHEREFORE seeing we have this ministry, as we have received mercy, we faint not;

How shall Christ's messengers be brave? Round them are so many scoffs, such indifference, they have such careless ears, such cold hearts, to deal with, that they are tempted to hide their message. Then two thoughts only can give them courage, the greatness of their ministry, and the wonderful mercy of God in choosing them to fulfil it. Their ministry is one of power, mercy, love; their exceeding unworthiness has been chosen out by the great God to be His instrument.

2. But have renounced the hidden things of dishonesty, not walking in craftiness, nor handling the word of God deceitfully; but by manifestation of the truth commanding ourselves to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

The gospel is a manifestation of the truth; it is the unveiling of life, and death, and holiness, and the nature of God; it sheds a light over time and eternity. Ah, what sincerity besits me who profess it! I ought to put far away unclean, or crooked, or selfish ways. Let me so live that I be not afraid of any eye.

3. But if our gospel be hid, it is hid to them that are lost:

Some there are to whom God's Word is darkness, who despise His preachers, abhor His House. Yes, such is their misery, they wander in the world's wilderness without a guide, or they turn away from the comfort, the peace, the strength which Divine Mercy offers. What will they do when deadly temptations assail them? What other light can they find if they reject Christ?

4. In whom the god of this world hath blinded the minds of them which believe not, lest the light of the glorious gospel of Christ, who is the image of God, should shine unto them.

Christ and the world cannot find room in the same heart. When any one is wholly set on the riches, honours, and pleasures of this

life, what room has he for thinking of Christ's glory? Scripture is comfortable, God's Spirit mighty, heaven glorious, conversion a new life ; but the worldly heart is all full of other matters, and will not let one ray of grace in.

5. For we preach not ourselves, but Christ Jesus the Lord; and ourselves your servants for Jesus' sake.

This verse contains rules for teaching and for living. Our teaching should be Christ Jesus, His Divine Nature, His human life and death, His risen glory ; we should leave no part of Him out. He is quite sufficient doctrine ; and our life should be that of servants, patient, attentive, diligent, concerned to fulfil our duty in all its parts, and get the Lord's work well done.

6. For God, who commanded the light to shine out of darkness, hath shined in our hearts, to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.

God, Who said at the beginning, "Let there be light," and there was light, now shines into darkened hearts, and makes a new creation there. Just as the beautiful creation, all in order and very good, came forth at His Will out of the eternal darkness, so now His grace sets the heart in order, causes truth to be known, settles life and actions after the heavenly Pattern. Let me, Lord, experience this Divine work of Thine, and so be a living proof of Thy gospel.

7. But we have this treasure in earthen vessels, that the excellency of the power may be of God, and not of us.

We who preach heavenly mysteries are yet of common clay; we have to suffer and die, we fail and make mistakes, we go astray ; it is true, and yet this does not quench God's power that works by our means. We speak of Almighty Love, and what that Love can do and has done for man. What matters it if we who speak are but fools ? the soul that receives the message of God's Love, and looks straight to Him, forgets the messenger's imperfections.

8. We are troubled on every side, yet not distressed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; g. persecuted, but not forsaken; cast down, but not destroyed;

What a union of outward troubles with inward freedom and peace ! However many are the believer's enemies, however lonely, oppressed, and forsaken he may be, yet

"Thou, Saviour, art his charmed bower,
His magic ring, his Rock, his Tower."

10. *Always bearing about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our body.*

Christians reflect their Master's life; if they experience distress, agony, and shame, it is but after Christ's Pattern, one day they will show forth His glorified life. He had to go along the way of sorrows, and so His best beloved have to follow. How can we expect to wear the crown, unless we have borne the Cross first?

11. *For we which live are alway delivered unto death for Jesus' sake, that the life also of Jesus might be made manifest in our mortal flesh.*

When sorrow comes, that is Christ's Cross laid on us; when joy comes back again, there is His Resurrection. It is not blind chance that smites or heals us, but God's loving Hand that deals us out sorrow or joy, to make us like His Son, Who knew both. That same power that brought back Christ from the grave brings light into our darkness.

12. *So then death worketh in us, but life in you.*

One has to suffer and to die, he is brought low, he comes to the gates of the grave; another enjoys outward and inward peace, he gains victories through Christ's strength. Both these conditions are of God, and after the pattern of Jesus; in our Good Friday we will cling fast to our Saviour's Cross, in our Easter we will ascribe to Him all the praise for our joy; one day all the sad hours will have passed and gone.

13. *We having the same spirit of faith, according as it is written, I believed, and therefore have I spoken; we also believe, and therefore speak;*

I trust in the redeeming power of God; I know that He is all love and mercy, that He gave His Son for me, that He raised Him up from the grave, that all my worst trials are ordered by His wisdom; this faith makes me speak, and others listen to me, for I speak of what I know. I have myself found God's love true; without this firm conviction I should not be able to persuade any one, but with it I have a key to open hearts.

14. *Knowing that he which raised up the Lord Jesus shall raise up us also by Jesus, and shall present us with you.*

On the third day He rose again from the dead. This truth gives us strength to bear bereavement, it enlightens our darkness, it com-

forts our sorrow. We see how great is God's power and love ; nothing can utterly separate us from Him, or from those who love Him.

"Jesus lives, henceforth is Death
But the gate of life immortal."

15. For all things are for your sakes, that the abundant grace might through the thanksgiving of many redound to the glory of God.

God's glory is the proper end of all things, they are meant to set that forth ; troubles and sorrows no less than mercies are designed for that end. Let me, Lord, in all my life give Thee due thanks. When I consider the mercies I enjoy, the dangers I escape, the great forbearance of God, the hopes which Faith holds out to me, what can I do but glorify God ?

16. For which cause we faint not ; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day.

May this be my experience ; as I grow weaker, as age creeps on me with its chilling breath, may I feel love warmer, and hope brighter. As I draw near to the confines of the eternal world, let all that is dear to me on earth still remain dear, but yet some rays from beyond the veil pierce through. I can bear to feel my body giving way, if my faith has laid hold on Christ's Hand.

17. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory ;

Compare, dear friend, what is light with what is weighty, a moment with eternity, affliction with glory, and reckon if it is wise to live wholly for this world. There is in us a longing for eternity; do not try to quench it by draughts of sinful pleasures, but think sometimes of the immortal life on whose edge you stand, and endeavour to prepare for that.

18. While we look not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen : for the things which are seen are temporal ; but the things which are not seen are eternal.

I see all round me the bright world ; I admire its grandeur, I count up its wealth, I prize its honours, and yet I am not utterly confounded or fascinated, for I know of something better. Prayer and my Bible, and the Holy Communion, have revealed to me God's kingdom, which is far greater and more lasting than anything here. With all my study of temporal things, I will never forget to make opportunity every day to look at the eternal things. When earth grows dim to me, heaven will shine out the brighter.

CHAPTER V.

1. That in his assured hope of immortal glory, 9. and in expectance of it, and of the general judgment, he laboureth to keep a good conscience, 12. not that he may herein boast of himself, 14. but as one that, having received life from Christ, endeavoureth to live as a new creature to Christ only, 18. and by his ministry of reconciliation to reconcile others also in Christ to God.

FOR we know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, an house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

The earthly house is of clay, and soon must fall. Perhaps it has already had some rude blows, perhaps the order has already gone forth to take it down; what matters it, if God has prepared for my soul a better dwelling elsewhere? He can raise up an abiding mansion out of the ruins of the earthly house. When my journey is done I shall rejoice to find myself at home with my heavenly Father.

2. *For in this we groan, earnestly desiring to be clothed upon with our house which is from heaven:*

Prisoners want to get free; travellers desire to reach their journey's end; believers, feeling the many miseries and temptations of the world, long for a better country. Death is indeed a grave matter, and God's judgment terrible, yet we trust in His promises. Faith in eternal life is part of ourselves; this world's dungeon walls cannot bar us in, we look forth and see heaven beyond.

3. *If so be that being clothed we shall not be found naked.*

The life to come is nothing shadowy or ghostlike; we shall remain ourselves; the fruits of patience and victory will be ours still. Sometimes weak human nature shudders at the thought of dying, but those who have believed, and loved, and fought against sin, and experienced God's mercy, will carry all this with them across the Jordan. Any pure prayers or acts of mercy will go with us; our friends' prayers too accompany our parting soul.

4. *For we that are in this tabernacle do groan, being burdened: not for that we would be unclothed, but clothed upon, that mortality might be swallowed up of life.*

It is not that I am discontented with this life. I thank God for all His mercies bestowed on me here. I shrink from dissolution; so

long as it is His Will I should remain, I am contented ; yet, after all, I have to die, and there is nothing here to detain me for ever. My body soon becomes a burden, my joys turn to loneliness, all my dearest hopes break up. Thank God, there is something which will last beyond the grave.

5. Now he that hath wrought us for the selfsame thing is God, who also hath given unto us the earnest of the Spirit.

God's purpose for us is immortal life. For this He created and redeemed us, for this His providence has ordered our lives. His desire is that we should dwell with Him in eternal joy, and He has given us already a part payment, a token of immortality let into the midst of time, that is, the Holy Spirit ; good thoughts, pure love, peace and truth, and a heavenly mind, are gifts of the Spirit, they are little bits of heaven bestowed already. If we cannot find any signs of the Spirit in our hearts, we lack this assurance.

6. Therefore we are always confident, knowing that, whilst we are at home in the body, we are absent from the Lord : 7. (for we walk by faith, not by sight.)

I feel that this world is not my home ; I am only on a visit here ; I am passing through it rapidly on my way to eternity. Here I cannot see my Father's face, nor retain the society of my friends. What a fool I should be if I set my heart on this world's comforts !

“ So little hold on them have we,
That we from them, or they from us,
May in a moment ravished be.”

8. We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.

There is a Home ready ; our journey will turn to rest at the end. Whatever becomes of this world, and our frail body, and what has been here, yet God is our Refuge ; if we are His, nothing can separate us from Him. Only, dear friends, do not use these expressions of hope and confidence unless you love God. In the mouth of careless livers such phrases are a deceitful sham.

9. Wherefore we labour, that, whether present or absent, we may be accepted of him.

Will the Day of Judgment find us on earth, or with the departed ? Will our end be sudden, or a long time of preparation be given us ? Shall we pass away with losty hopes and bright visions, or oppressed by pain and sadness ? We know not, nor does it matter much ; let us only so live that our Master may welcome us as faithful servants when He does come.

10. *For we must all appear before the judgment seat of Christ ; that every one may receive the things done in his body, according to that he hath done, whether it be good or bad.*

O Lord, let me never lose my faith in Thy Judgment ; let me remember always that all good and all evil shall find their sure recompense. Man's judgment often misses the truth, but God's Judgment is certain ; oppression, and deceit, and persuading another to sin, and a selfish, indulgent life, will all be condemned in that day. May the remembrance of the Judgment to come quicken me in all good works, and hold me back from sin !

11. *Knowing therefore the terror of the Lord, we persuade men ; but we are made manifest unto God ; and I trust also are made manifest in your consciences.*

This is the secret of successful preaching ; we must ourselves have felt God's fear, sin's awfulness, the nearness of eternal death. Those who have stood on the edge of the pit are alone able to convince their brethren of its reality. May God turn our dark hours into this power of persuasion ; may our own conscience with its grave burdens be able to speak straight to the conscience of sinners !

12. *For we commend not ourselves again unto you, but give you occasion to glory on our behalf, that ye may have somewhat to answer them which glory in appearance, and not in heart.*

13. *For whether we be beside ourselves, it is to God : or whether we be sober, it is for your cause.*

S. Paul used sometimes to vindicate himself earnestly against false charges ; his whole soul was carried away in defending his honesty. Again, sometimes he despised such accusations, and was content to let his life answer for itself. Whichever be our way, whether we defend our character, or whether, as is often best, we remain silent under slander, let us behave as in God's sight, remembering that His judgment is the most important, that of men matters much less.

14. *For the love of Christ constraineth us ; because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead :*

Let me feel, O Lord, this power of Thy love. Thou hast died for me. Whatever I am, I have a share in Thy Cross. Thy abundant mercy sought me out and redeemed me. I cannot be holy or happy, I cannot live in peace, or die in hope, without Thee. Let me endeavour to copy Thy love by giving myself up to do good.

15. And that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again.

I have a share too in Thy resurrection. My inward life is from above. Divine power, Divine mercy, have breathed into my heart, as life returned to Christ's Body in the sepulchre. I have put away tempers of this earth, and have a home in heaven to which I belong. Jesus lives, and therefore I can through Him trample on sin and overcome slavish fear.

16. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh : yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more.

Men have no longer their mere earthly aspect, they are redeemed souls who belong to heaven, and are preparing for it. Christ Himself is no longer a mere man, however wise and good, nor a Jewish Messiah, nor a pattern of holy living only. I see in Him a Divine Redeemer, Who quickens the soul with new life ; I adore Him as my Lord and God, and look forward to seeing Him on His Judgment Throne. Persons who lived in Nazareth, or heard Jesus Christ preach by the Sea of Galilee, did not know of Him what I know.

17. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature : old things are passed away ; behold, all things are become new.

Alas ! have I not fallen back again into the old unregenerate world ? Do I not feel that earthly desires, and fears, and plans come between me and the new life of grace ? What are vile thoughts and bitter jealousies, but old things which ought to be put away for ever ? O Lord, bestow on me new life, let me make a fresh start in Thy service. I would fain see myself and my brethren, and all things here, as they are in Thy sight. What has come to blind my eyes ?

18. And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation ;

S. Paul felt this reconciliation in himself, and so he could tell of it to his brethren. God has manifested His love in the Person of Christ, and so made us His friends again ; our sin, our misery, our haunting fears, which cut us off from God's love, are all done away in Christ, only let not sin break this bond again. It is better to be God's friends and Christ's brethren, than to enjoy all the world's advantages without inward peace.

19. To wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation.

Good news, good news! there is pardon for us ; our trespasses, however great and many, can be washed away. The Sacrifice of the Cross still avails for our salvation ; in Christ's Church every day this message is set forth, sacraments bring it home to us, sermons repeat it, prayers rise up in the strength of it. However vile we are, yet Infinite Love regards us as "in Christ," and so reckons His merits to us, as once our sins were laid on Him.

20. Now then we are ambassadors for Christ, as though God did beseech you by us : we pray you in Christ's stead, be ye reconciled to God.

Consider what has interrupted your union with God ; His Spirit pleads with you ; He desires you to put away whatever stops you from prayer, from praise, from a good hope. Often God's children forget their Father, they are His in name only, yet He longs for them to be His in heart ; He sends after them by many calls, and warnings, and opportunities, and bids them come back.

21. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin ; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him.

Christ was made sin. The All-holy One was pleased to enter into communion with our vileness. He saw it close at hand ; He was tempted by it ; it wrapped Him in darkness and sorrow. He knows what evil things are wont to assail us ; yet all the time He abhorred sin and fought against it, and by His victory has given power to us to overcome too. However great the power of evil is, be sure that the power of Divine Love is greater. You see how Christ rose again, Death could not hold Him ; He passed through the state of temptation, and holds out His pierced hands to strengthen us.

CHAPTER VI.

1. That he hath approved himself a faithful minister of Christ, both by his exhortations, 3. and by integrity of life, 4. and by patient enduring all kinds of affliction and disgraces for the gospel. 10. Of which he speaketh the more boldly amongst them, because his heart is open to them, 13. and he expecteth the like affection from them again, 14. exhorting to flee the society and pollutions of idolaters, as being themselves temples of the living God.

WE then, as workers together with him, beseech you also that ye receive not the grace of God in vain.

God keep us from receiving His grace in vain. There are some who believe the Christian Faith, who profess it warmly, who seem for awhile to live by it, and yet at last lose it altogether. For awhile their hearts were stirred by the tale of God's mercy ; judgment seemed awful, heaven seemed sweet ; and yet it was all in vain, they did not hold it fast.

2. (For he saith, I have heard thee in a time accepted, and in the day of salvation have I succoured thee : behold, now is the accepted time ; behold, now is the day of salvation.)

Observe God's seasons ; the day of grace is now. In business matters those who would succeed must watch for their chance ; the farmer takes the fit time to sow or to reap ; we also have our time in which we may turn to God, or make a step onward in His service. God's Spirit comes to us with pleadings and warnings ; He tells us to put away evil and serve God ; if we neglect Him, such a chance may not come again.

3. Giving no offence in any thing, that the ministry be not blamed :

The minister's sins are a stumbling-block in the way of his message. If he allows himself in sloth, in idle talk, in a self-indulgent life, still more if he falls into grave sins, his life does more to pull down than his preaching to build up. Not only does he injure his own soul, but hinders numbers from conversion.

4. But in all things approving ourselves as the ministers of God, in much patience, in afflictions, in necessities, in distresses,

I may not outwardly have to endure what S. Paul had, my life may be a quiet and peaceful one, guarded from danger and afflictions ; nay, I need patience too,—much patience was the key to all his life. I also must seek this necessary gift. Little worries, pains of body or mind, contradictions from those among whom I live, disappointments and failures are all meant to teach me this precious lesson ; if God spares me great agonies, it is in condescension to my weakness.

5. In stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labours, in watchings, in fastings ;

How little is a sharp word, an unkindness, a dull hour or hard task, compared with what missionaries have borne in heathen lands for God's sake ! We make so much of anything that crosses our will, but God's servants had every experience of blows, insults, and privations.

6. By pureness, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned,

We shall overcome all difficulties if we are furnished thus. We need not fear to part with our young friends when they leave home and start in life, if we have taught them these precious lessons—purity, that endures no taint of evil; knowledge to distinguish between right and wrong; patience to put up with trials; kindness to be useful and helpful everywhere; the Holy Ghost sought in daily prayer to renew and quicken the heart; true love, not merely a smiling face or respectful outside.

7. By the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armour of righteousness on the right hand and on the left,

Here is a mighty warrior; his arms are sincere words, Divine grace, an upright life. Outwardly he may seem weak and frail, but he has power to overcome sin, the world, and the devil; he can find a way through all difficulties, and open the gates of heaven.

8. By honour and dishonour, by evil report and good report: as deceivers, and yet true;

Is it wonderful that we should be spoken ill of? Are we the first Christians of whom bitter things have been said, who have been suspected, or reviled? When men say the worst things of us, we need not be ashamed, if God is our witness. It is better to be at peace with Him than to have all the world's favours.

9. As unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and, behold, we live; as chastened, and not killed; 10. as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.

How can all these contradictions be true of the same person? life and death, joy and sorrow, poverty and riches, all meeting in the same subject. The lives of many earnest Christians have been just like this, a strange union of inward peace, strength, and hope, with a weight of afflictions. They have been crushed down by trials, by contempt, by approaching death, and yet, along with all this, have had a sense of victory.

11. O ye Corinthians, our mouth is open unto you, our heart is enlarged.

He spoke the whole truth as he felt it; he took them all into his heart, all their faults, their suspicions, their coldness; he took them just as they were, and could not help loving them. Lord,

give me this largeness of heart, that I may make room for all my friends there. I have been dreadfully narrow and suspicious, and hard to please.

12. Ye are not straitened in us, but ye are straitened in your own bowels. 13. Now for a recompence in the same, (I speak as unto my children,) be ye also enlarged.

This is the way to make others better : treat them generously ; allow for all that is good in them ; trust and love them, and good will spring up in their hearts too. How can we expect those whom we live with to improve unless we encourage them by kindness ? Think how we ourselves have been raised and brightened by the esteem of kind hearts.

14. Be ye not unequally yoked together with unbelievers : for what fellowship hath righteousness with unrighteousness ? and what communion hath light with darkness ?

What union can there be between two hearts unless there is a common Faith ? How grievous it is when temptations and sorrows come, and two hearts have to encounter them together, of whom one believes, prays, seeks God's House, and the other abhors all this, and seeks comfort only in worldly pleasures ! Lord, breathe into Thy servants' hearts a spirit of loyalty to Thee, so that Thy holy law may be their bond of union ; let them see the danger of all love that is not sanctified by Thee.

15. And what concord hath Christ with Belial ? or what part hath he that believeth with an infidel ?

Choose for your friends those who are God's friends ; be seen together in God's House, at His Table, in upright and pure ways. What remorse you would find at last from that society which seemed at first so fine, so pleasant, so profitable, yet where God's Name was only mentioned with scoffs !

16. And what agreement hath the temple of God with idols ? for ye are the temple of the living God ; as God hath said, I will dwell in them, and walk in them ; and I will be their God, and they shall be my people.

Alas ! if my soul is God's Temple, how it has been polluted ! If God has come to dwell there, how many things He has found that are unfit for His Presence ! What shall I do if He were to leave me altogether ? Without Him I am but darkness. I should not like to see a church left dirty, full of rubbish, open to the birds, made

use of for worldly business, yet I fear my consecrated heart has been often thus.

17. Wherefore come out from among them, and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, 18. and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be my sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.

Those who have given up the praise of men sooner than displease God have found consolation in Him. He has more than made up to them for the dull hours, the ridicule, the reproaches, which may have been theirs because they would not join in careless society. Remember that God is Infinite, He is full of all goodness, He is the Portion of His servants here and hereafter; only be brave, and choose any hardship rather than the paths of sin.

CHAPTER VII.

1. He proceedeth in exhorting them to purity of life, 2. and to bear him like affection as he doth to them. 3. Whereof lest he might seem to doubt, he declareth what comfort he took in his afflictions, by the report which Titus gave of their godly sorrow, which his former epistle had wrought in them, 13. and of their lovingkindness and obedience towards Titus, answerable to his former boastings of them.

HAVING therefore these promises, dearly beloved, let us cleanse ourselves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God.

We are God's children; He has redeemed and blest us, has made us heirs of His kingdom. He has begun a good work in us; let us therefore go on in the right way, boldly, yet with fear. Not all who begin in holiness bring it to perfection; not all who receive the promises reap their fulfilment. Still, if we strive against evil, a mightier power than our own is with us.

2. Receive us; we have wronged no man, we have corrupted no man, we have defrauded no man. 3. I speak not this to condemn you: for I have said before, that ye are in our hearts to die and live with you.

Many harsh things had been said against the Apostle, yet this did not make him give up his friends. He defended himself simply and earnestly. He bade them weigh his defence well. He

assured them that he could not do without their goodwill. When we are unjustly blamed, here is an excellent example to keep us cool, and show us how to behave.

4. *Great is my boldness of speech toward you, great is my glorying of you : I am filled with comfort, I am exceeding joyful in all our tribulation.*

This has been the frequent experience of God's servants ; they had great trials to bear, had to blame and condemn evil sharply, were plunged in anguish of body and mind, and yet all through they had immense comforts to tell of. The more sorrows they had the more joy they had too. This seems strange to us in our cold heartless days, but this is what the Saints write to tell us. Where there was most to suffer there was most to delight in.

5. *For, when we were come into Macedonia, our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side ; without were fightings, within were fears.*

Bodily pain is not the worst of ills ; the Saints had harder trials than that. They had times of long suspense ; they were grieved for their friends' condition. I am sure all cannot be right with me if I sit comfortably at home and forget all the misery, sin, and pain there is so near my door. The Apostle was not like that.

6. *Nevertheless God, that comforteth those that are cast down, comforted us by the coming of Titus ; 7. and not by his coming only, but by the consolation wherewith he was comforted in you, when he told us your earnest desire, your mourning, your fervent mind toward me ; so that I rejoiced the more.*

Why, was not S. Paul a heavenly-minded person ? did he not receive visions from above ? Who ever said more glorious things about Divine grace than he ? How comes it he leans so much on earthly hearts ? This is no weakness in him ; true human nature is made to desire sympathy. Being inspired by God did not deaden his affections towards men. If we boast of not needing human comfort, beware lest this is pride or coldness ; Divine grace does not speak so. God's love is greatly shown to us in the loving sympathy of our dear ones.

8. *For though I made you sorry with a letter, I do not repent, though I did repent : for I perceive that the same epistle hath made you sorry, though it were but for a season.*

It would be false charity never to speak of faults, or dangers, or what is amiss, yet we need heavenly guidance to choose the right

occasion and right way of doing it. S. Paul softened his reproaches by the tenderness which went with them. He was more ashamed and grieved for what went wrong than the offenders were ; thus he won them to share his own feelings. How different this is from formal harsh reproofs !

9. Now I rejoice, not that ye were made sorry, but that ye sorrowed to repentance : for ye were made sorry after a godly manner, that ye might receive damage by us in nothing.

This is fruitful sorrow, sowing in tears that we may reap in joy. This is the sorrow of Peter, not that of Judas. Oh that we could see many sinners thus grieved for their faults, thus rejoicing in God's mercy, thus full of good resolutions for the future ! Such sorrow as this indeed damages our conceit, and upsets our tranquillity, but is exceedingly profitable to our real self.

10. For godly sorrow worketh repentance to salvation not to be repented of : but the sorrow of the world worketh death.

Beware of the world's sorrow, discontent, gloom, bitterness, shame at lost credit : these are not the work of God's Spirit. Keep us, Lord, from hopeless discouragement. We cannot bear the sight of our sins except in the light of Thy mercy. It is death to us to feel the vileness of sin, and yet have no hope of doing better.

11. For behold this selfsame thing, that ye sorrowed after a godly sort, what carefulness it wrought in you, yea, what clearing of yourselves, yea, what indignation, yea, what fear, yea, what vehement desire, yea, what zeal, yea, what revenge ! In all things ye have approved yourselves to be clear in this matter.

Let the remembrance of my past falls work these same effects in me. Let me show carefulness, by being in earnest. I would clear myself, that means be anxious about my character henceforward. Give me, too, a hatred of wrong, fear of God's judgment, vehement desire, or ready warm feeling for others. Let me have zeal to lead a higher life ; let me revenge or punish what is amiss in myself. If my faults are thus repented of, God's mercy will have turned them into steps for me to rise upward.

12. Wherefore, though I wrote unto you, I did it not for his cause that had done the wrong, nor for his cause that suffered wrong, but that our care for you in the sight of God might appear unto you.

The sin of the Christian at Corinth (which is related in 1 Corinthians v. 1) was overruled by God both to the man's own repentance,

and to awake his brethren's earnestness, and to prove how S. Paul cared for them. How strange it is that God's wise Providence can bring so much good out of evil ! Still our business is to fly from evil ; yet if we have done wrong, then is the time to trust in healing mercy ; wrong should not weigh us down for ever.

13. Therefore we were comforted in your comfort : yea, and exceedingly the more joyed we for the joy of Titus, because his spirit was refreshed by you all.

Just so the angels in heaven rejoice over a sinner that repenteth. We should be glad to see the fruits of God's Spirit ; it should be refreshment to us to see new life beginning in others. Oh for a breath of Divine grace to breathe true comfort into the many weary barren hearts around ! Titus was refreshed by seeing how his friends had learnt to hate sin and love God.

14. For if I have boasted any thing to him of you, I am not ashamed ; but as we spake all things to you in truth, even so our boasting, which I made before Titus, is found a truth.

It is a happy temper to be ready to see good in others. S. Paul trusted his friends ; he spoke beforehand to Titus of their real good qualities, of the love they had for him, of their desire to advance in God's ways. This is the way to bring good out of other hearts, believe in it, and look for it.

15. And his inward affection is more abundant toward you, whilst he remembereth the obedience of you all, how with fear and trembling ye received him. 16. I rejoice therefore that I have confidence in you in all things.

This good came of plain speaking. If the Apostle had avoided any mention of the sin which he had heard of, for fear of giving pain, things would have been more pleasant, but sinners would have gone on in evil unchecked. He wrote very sharply : he blamed those who had allowed such evil, he bade them cast out the offender, and as the fruit of all this came obedience, peace, renewed trust.

CHAPTER VIII.

1. He stirreth them up to a liberal contribution for the poor saints at Jerusalem, by the example of the Macedonians, 7. by commendation of their former forwardness, 9. by the example of Christ, 14. and by the spiritual profit that shall redound to themselves thereby : 16. commanding to them the integrity and willingness of Titus, and those other brethren, who upon his request, exhortation, and commendation, were purposely come to them for this business.

MOREOVER, brethren, we do you to wit of the grace of God bestowed on the churches of Macedonia ; 2. how that in a great trial of affliction the abundance of their joy and their deep poverty abounded unto the riches of their liberality.

God bestowed two good gifts on the Christians in Macedonia, patience and liberality. They had to suffer trials for God's Name, and all these sufferings only made their hearts more tender for the wants of the poor. They knew what it was to be afflicted, and so could understand what need, and ill-use, and anxiety meant. When God sends us trouble, He would have us become under it more sympathising and open-handed ; open our hearts wide, not close them sullenly.

3. For to their power, I bear record, yea, and beyond their power they were willing of themselves ;

The charity of the poor is dear in God's eyes. He approved the widow's mite. He looks not at the money we give, but at the heart that offers it. It is not the power that any one has to offer thousands of pounds, but love, and faith, and pity for the suffering that fix the value of charity. If you are willing to make some offering for God, be sure the power will not be wanting to you.

4. Praying us with much intreaty that we would receive the gift, and take upon us the fellowship of the ministering to the saints.

Instead of brooding over their own losses, the Christians in Macedonia, who had plenty of troubles of their own (1 Thessalonians ii. 14), were full of pity for their brethren in Judea. They were now all one body in Christ ; Gentiles cared for Jews, Macedonians for men of another speech and country. What but faith in Christ could bridge over this gulf, and make all believers brethren ?

5. And this they did, not as we hoped, but first gave their own selves to the Lord, and unto us by the will of God.

Lord, in all my giving let me give myself ; let my obedience, my pity, my thought for the sufferer accompany my alms. Only Thy grace can accomplish this. I know well that being comfortably off has a strong tendency to make me selfish. I am ready to grudge time and trouble bestowed on the suffering, even if I give my money.

6. Insomuch that we desired Titus, that as he had begun, so he would also finish in you the same grace also.

Let our object be like that of S. Paul and of Titus, to finish a good work, not only to begin it. Never give up a work of mercy that you have begun. Keep on your gifts to a society, to a mission, to a sick person ; let your whole desire be to answer to the calls which God has put before you. Do your work for your heavenly Master at least as perfectly as you would complete an earthly task.

7. Therefore, as ye abound in every thing, in faith, and utterance, and knowledge, and in all diligence, and in your love to us, see that ye abound in this grace also.

This was wanted for a complete character. Faith, and a power of speaking God's truth, and a knowledge of Scripture, and diligence in our work, and an affectionate disposition, all these are not enough unless there is also a liberal heart for the poor and suffering. Let us take care not to leave out this grace from our list. Why is there suffering round us, except to stir up our pity to relieve it ?

8. I speak not by commandment, but by occasion of the forwardness of others, and to prove the sincerity of your love.

Others have given freely, others have prayed earnestly, have overcome temptations, have triumphed over death and hell. Why should not we do what they have done ? The gospel has set up a lofty standard for mankind, and many Christians have set themselves to follow it ; why should our forwardness in God's service be less than theirs ?

9. For ye know the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, that, though he was rich, yet for your sakes he became poor, that ye through his poverty might be rich.

Our dear Lord and Master gave up heavenly glory to live on this poor earth, and while here He led a humble life of self-sacrifice.

This was all out of love. He had our good in view ; He knew we needed such an example and such a redemption. His Spirit is a measure for us, and bids us be glad to give up for our brethren's sake.

10. And herein I give my advice : for this is expedient for you, who have begun before, not only to do, but also to be forward a year ago. 11. Now therefore perform the doing of it ; that as there was a readiness to will, so there may be a performance also out of that which ye have.

Good desires are not enough. When God has bestowed on us the desire to perform some good work, let us be ready to carry it out. I know to my shame how often God has put into my mind the thought of bestowing some charity, and I have never, or not for a long while, attended to it. It is easy to think how we should like to do this or that good action, but, dear friends, now is the time ; do what you can, give what you are able, show what love or pity is in your power, lest to-morrow find the chance gone.

12. For if there be first a willing mind, it is accepted according to that a man hath, and not according to that he hath not.

Love makes a gift precious. Charity is within the reach of all ; even the poorest can make some offering. God sees in secret ; He knows and approves many offerings which never reach the eye or win the praise of man. How good is our God to put within every one's reach the power of making some return for His love !

13. For I mean not that other men be eased, and ye burdened : 14. but by an equality, that now at this time your abundance may be a supply for their want, that their abundance also may be a supply for your want : that there may be equality :

I do not lose by charity ; nay, I rather gain. I am the richer spiritually for giving up to others in their need ; and perhaps when my time of want or suffering comes God will raise up helpers for me in my turn. I must not think that it is very good and liberal of me to sacrifice my comfort for theirs ; nay, I am only carrying out my Master's orders. He has committed to me some gifts to take to my brethren ; if I perform this task well and wisely, I shall please Him.

15. As it is written, He that had gathered much had nothing over ; and he that had gathered little had no lack.

He who tried to hoard his share of manna, found that it spoiled.

He who was weak, and could collect but a little, yet found that suffice him. Such is God's plan ; He gives happiness very evenly on the whole ; He tempers our enjoyments and our responsibilities according to our several characters. Let us be ready and willing to fulfil His gracious purposes.

16. But thanks be to God, which put the same earnest care into the heart of Titus for you. 17. For indeed he accepted the exhortation ; but being more forward, of his own accord he went unto you.

Here we see the gifts which led S. Paul afterwards to set Titus to govern the Church in Crete. He had an earnest care for his brethren ; he cheerfully undertook the trouble of making this collection and the dangers and fatigues of the long journey. He felt for the sufferings of the Jewish Christians, and stirred up the hearts of the Greeks by recounting them.

18. And we have sent with him the brother, whose praise is in the gospel throughout all the churches ; 19. and not that only, but who was also chosen of the churches to travel with us with this grace, which is administered by us to the glory of the same Lord, and declaration of your ready mind :

Who was this highly honoured person who went with Titus ? Scripture does not give his name, it may have been S. Luke, or Trophimus, or some other friend of S. Paul ; numberless Christians loved and praised him, they chose to intrust their offerings to his care ; but now we are left to guess at his name. God's glory remains ; all Christian love and sacrifice tend to further that. What does it matter about the praise of men ? if our good works are known in heaven, that is enough.

20. Avoiding this, that no man should blame us in this abundance which is administered by us : 21. providing for honest things, not only in the sight of the Lord, but also in the sight of men.

Lord, give me in all my dealings this same prudence ; let me take care to avoid blame as far as I rightly can ; let no one have a word to say against my honesty, my purity, my soberness, if I can prevent it. A good character is so great a treasure, that it needs to be guarded carefully. Let me think first always that God sees me, and then not forget that men see me too.

22. And we have sent with them our brother, whom we have oftentimes proved diligent in many things, but now much more diligent, upon the great confidence which I have in you.

Here is another friend of S. Paul whose name is not told us. All we know of him is that he had often been proved diligent; S. Paul had found him thoroughly trustworthy. Let such a word remain concerning us after we have passed away. We may possess no great or shining qualities, but let us take up whatever work God gives us, and do it with all our hearts; this will be praise enough.

23. Whether any do enquire of Titus, he is my partner and fellowhelper concerning you: or our brethren be enquired of, they are the messengers of the churches, and the glory of Christ.

Why the glory of Christ? Because the Jewish Christians, whose need was to be supplied from this great collection, would glorify Jesus the Lord for the wonderful work He had wrought in opening Gentile hearts to believe and to feel for them. They were so persecuted, so tempted to blaspheme Christ, so hard pressed by their Jewish enemies, that their faith at times was hard put to it; this revelation of the communion of saints would make them see what Christ had done.

24. Wherefore shew ye to them, and before the churches, the proof of your love, and of our boasting on your behalf.

At the Day of Judgment Christ the Lord will require proofs of love; it will not be enough to speak of our faith or our feelings, the Judge will ask what we have done to prove our love, if we have relieved, comforted, honoured Him in His suffering members. Without this all our friends' good opinion of us will be of no account. How different is their esteem of us from the judgment of God!

CHAPTER IX.

1. He yieldeth the reason why, though he knew their forwardness, yet he sent Titus and his brethren beforehand. 6. And he proceedeth in stirring them up to a bountiful alms, as being but a kind of sowing of seed, 10. which shall return a great increase to them, 13. and occasion a great sacrifice of thanksgivings unto God.

FOR as touching the ministering to the saints, it is superfluous for me to write to you:

Why did the saints or Christians in Judaea need this help? They often lost their employment and all their prospects by becoming Christians; all their friends who remained Jews shut their doors against them; they were universally reviled and suspected; thus they were nearly starving. It must have needed strength from

above to confess Christ when it brought such penalties. S. Paul felt all this so much, that he longed to bring them assistance.

2. *For I know the forwardness of your mind, for which I boast of you to them of Macedonia, that Achaia was ready a year ago; and your zeal hath provoked very many.*

Thank God for the virtue of a good example. Let others' zeal provoke me to do as they do. Why has God set round us reverent behaviour, self-sacrifice, unswerving honesty, steady sober lives, but that we may be stirred up to copy them? Some saints may have got on well in a desert, each alone by himself, but I need exceedingly to be with good people; I depend on the wholesome lessons I learn from them.

3. *Yet have I sent the brethren, lest our boasting of you should be in vain in this behalf; that, as I said, ye may be ready: 4. lest haply if they of Macedonia come with me, and find you unprepared, we (that we say not, ye) should be ashamed in this same confident boasting.*

The apostle trusted his friends. He knew they would give to the uttermost of their power. He knew the sad tale of their brethren's distress in Judea would have touched their hearts. It is a sign of honesty of purpose and just disposition in ourselves when we are ready to trust others. God give us this happy confidence, that so we may awaken all that is best in those whom we are with. Let us be ready to praise, glad to believe in our friends.

5. *Therefore I thought it necessary to exhort the brethren, that they would go before unto you, and make up beforehand your bounty, whereof ye had notice before, that the same might be ready, as a matter of bounty, and not as of covetousness.*

This verse stirs us up to be ready; it bids us do God's work punctually, regularly, thoroughly. The collectors went before, made up the collection before, had given notice about it before. The Christian watchword is 'Beforehand.' Let loss come, or temptation, we will be beforehand with it; let our work for God or man be all ready and in order.

6. *But this I say, He which soweth sparingly shall reap also sparingly; and he which soweth bountifully shall reap also bountifully.*

Sow love and sacrifice, and God will repay you with blessing. He takes no account of the numbers of coins, but of the giver's heart. He has no need of our money, yet He will not forget any offering that love makes. Just as surely as the harvest springs from the

sowing, do God's rewards follow on acts of self-denial and liberality done in His Name; only, alas! if we sow contempt, injustice, hatred, a terrible crop of such evils will be brought home to us.

7. Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

This verse does not mean that we should throw away or waste our charity on chance beggars; it is too precious a task for that. If we would have God accept it, we should bestow it wisely as well as gladly. The merciful God is pleased to put before us such distressed persons, such missions, such interests, such calls for one's money; it is His goodness that provides us with messengers to take our offerings to His Court; He would have our treasures laid up safely in heaven.

8. And God is able to make all grace abound toward you; that ye, always having all sufficiency in all things, may abound to every good work: 9. (as it is written, He hath dispersed abroad; he hath given to the poor: his righteousness remaineth for ever.

God rewards the charitable with charitable hearts above all; they make a sacrifice of earthly wealth for His Name, and He pays them back in heavenly coin. I do not say that He forgets to give them this world's blessings, but the special reward is a liberal heart. Bountifulness becomes a blessed habit of the mind, and is always ready to answer to God's calls.

10. Now he that ministereth seed to the sower both minister bread for your food, and multiply your seed sown, and increase the fruits of your righteousness;)

Pass on God's gifts, dear friend, if you would have them multiply. The sower gives to the earth, the earth to the reaper, clouds supply the springs, they send on the gift to the sea. A soul that takes without giving is a broken link in the chain; it opposes a barrier to God's great law of circulation. All things spoil and rust if I try to keep them for my own selfish enjoyment.

11. Being enriched in every thing to all bountifulness, which causeth through us thanksgiving to God

This is why God puts riches in the hands of some, to produce bountifulness and consequent thankfulness. He is pleased to distribute things so unevenly in this world in order that greater good may be wrought thus. If every one in the world were just as well off as his neighbour, all this growth of charity would be quite stunted.

It is want and distress that call forth efforts of love in the giver and feelings of gratitude in the receiver.

12. For the administration of this service not only supplieth the want of the saints, but is abundant also by many thanksgivings unto God;

The poor Jewish Christians, who received support in their great distress from the loving gifts of the Greek Christians, were stirred up to praise God; they felt what a bond of love the gospel was; in the midst of all their sufferings a ray of light shone upon them through the bounty of these unknown brethren in distant lands. So there are many good works and brave workers nowadays whose far-off hearts we might refresh too.

13. Whiles by the experiment of this ministration they glorify God for your professed subjection unto the gospel of Christ, and for your liberal distribution unto them, and unto all men; 14. and by their prayer for you, which long after you for the exceeding grace of God in you.

This was a peace-offering from the Gentile to the Jewish Church. It taught narrow minds that the Gentiles were now joined in one Church with them. It showed that faith and love had spread abroad over the whole earth. God's time was now come for knitting together in one Divine Society believers from all nations. An interchange of prayer and alms had begun between those whom nature and education had made quite hostile to each other. Let it be ours to continue this blessed work of union amongst all believers.

15. Thanks be unto God for his unspeakable gift.

Give me, O Lord, with all Thy gifts a liberal heart. Let Thy wonderful mercies to me in nature and in grace incline my heart to answer freely to the calls which are made upon me. Thou hast poured on me many blessings, give me love too, that so I may turn them to good account. Let my reflections on these last two chapters about almsgiving teach me this lesson, that

“ He only who forgets to hoard
Has learned to live.”

CHAPTER X.

Against the false apostles, who disgraced the weakness of his person and bodily presence, he setteth out the spiritual might and authority, with which he is armed against all adversary powers, 7. assuring them that at his coming he will be found as mighty in word, as he is now in writing being absent, 12. and withal taxing them for reaching out themselves beyond their compass, and vaunting themselves into other men's labours.

NOw I Paul myself beseech you by the meekness and gentleness of Christ, who in presence am base among you, but being absent am bold toward you :

Look at the gospel pattern. Christ's life revealed to men that patience, kindness, gentleness, are the highest virtues. Before that time the world had followed above all what was grand and heroic, but the character of our dear Lord has given men wider thoughts. God has now put the highest standard of life within the reach of very humble persons. We may not be very wise nor very brave, but we can all be meek, and patient, as Christ was.

2. But I beseech you, that I may not be bold when I am present with that confidence, wherewith I think to be bold against some, which think of us as if we walked according to the flesh.
3. For though we walk in the flesh, we do not war after the flesh :

The apostle's enemies accused him of worldly policy. They said he changed about according to circumstances,—from too much humbleness to too much pride. Whether he entreated gently or blamed severely, they always found him wrong. What should a Christian do who is thus blamed unjustly? Surely he must go on doing what he believes right, and not mind what men say. Let his conduct be as in God's sight; let him draw wisdom and courage from his daily prayers. Though men condemn him, God will take his side.

4. (For the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds;) 5. casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; 6. and having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled.

Here is a great general speaking. He is taking fortresses, overthrowing armies, binding captives, punishing rebels. What was all this warfare directed against? It was against sin, and unbelief, and pride. The saints brought terrible batteries to bear against our hearts. They stormed the inmost recesses there, caused Jesus Christ to be enthroned as Lord, made the whole will and life be subject to Him. This is indeed a glorious victory. May Divine grace work such in us and by our means.

7. *Do ye look on things after the outward appearance? If any man trust to himself that he is Christ's, let him of himself think this again, that, as he is Christ's, even so are we Christ's.*

God give us eyes to look within. The outward appearance is no sure guide to the heart. I know indeed that I appear to be a Christian, that I come to church, or to God's altar, yet all this does not make me belong to Christ. What sort of character is that which shows true marks of Christ dwelling in us? Those are His who walk in purity, in love, in uprightness, who make a bold stand against evil.

8. *For though I should boast somewhat more of our authority, which the Lord hath given us for edification; and not for your destruction, I should not be ashamed: 9. that I may not seem as if I would terrify you by letters.*

The authority of Christ's Church is for our edification. We cannot cut ourselves off from the teaching of eighteen centuries, and say, "The Bible, and the Bible only." Why did God set up apostles, and after them bishops and pastors? Why has He made us heirs of all the experience of so many Christian ages? Surely that we might reverently follow the Church of Christ, and submit to her wise rules and customs. As a general rule, those will serve God most safely who obey what the Church has taught from the beginning.

10. *For his letters, say they, are weighty and powerful; but his bodily presence is weak, and his speech contemptible.*

Even the apostle's enemies felt the power of his epistles. Much more ought I to do so who love and honour him. I have reason to thank God for the wonderful gifts of writing which He bestowed on S. Paul. His letters tell me so much about the early Church; they penetrate my inmost heart; they paint the conflict of grace and sin which I myself feel; they tell me of eternal truths. What should I do without them?

11. *Let such an one think this, that, such as we are in word by letters when we are absent, such will we be also in deed when we are present.*

Let words and deeds agree. Alas, how often I have spoken nobly about religion, and then acted foolishly ! My thoughts and words when I am at my prayers are often devout, and then my behaviour amongst my friends very silly. Let me strive for a consistent uniform life that remains the same wherever I am, or whatever I am doing.

12. For we dare not make ourselves of the number, or compare ourselves with some that commend themselves: but they measuring themselves by themselves, and comparing themselves among themselves, are not wise.

How self-complacency creeps into our best actions ! We reckon up our piety ; we compare ourselves with those who live carelessly, and feel how much wiser, more devout, more upright we are. Ah, dear Lord ! open our eyes, let us look at Thy Word, or the pattern of Thy saints, and recognise ourselves as fools. Let us shake off this empty conceit, and see ourselves as we really are before Thee. Thy judgment is so different from that which our vanity passes.

13. But we will not boast of things without our measure, but according to the measure of the rule which God hath distributed to us, a measure to reach even unto you.

Even S. Paul had a sphere of work assigned him, and certain countries for his portion. He did not interfere among the Jews, nor where other missionaries had begun to preach. He took a certain task, and set himself to accomplish that. If we are inclined to be discontented with our duties, we may remember that God put us there, that He bids us do the duties which He has assigned. Our measure may be small, but He bids us fill up that to the best of our power.

14. For we stretch not ourselves beyond our measure, as though we reached not unto you: for we are come as far as to you also in preaching the gospel of Christ: 15. not boasting of things without our measure, that is, of other men's labours; but having hope, when your faith is increased, that we shall be enlarged by you according to our rule abundantly, 16. to preach the gospel in the regions beyond you, and not to boast in another man's line of things made ready to our hand.

Our maps tell us of many countries which were not known in S. Paul's day. Regions which he had not heard of have received the same gospel, and worshipped the same Lord that he preached. Yet it was he whose labours first made the faith known. We are all indebted to him. The Holy Spirit's work in preparing mis-

sionaries and sending them forth into heathen lands is indeed wonderful. These are soldiers of the Cross who have harder fights and win more blessed victories than the world's soldiers do. Let us do our best to help on this glorious warfare.

17. But he that glorieth, let him glory in the Lord. 18. For not he that commendeth himself is approved, but whom the Lord commendeth.

It is no profit to pride ourselves on losty talents, on eloquent words, on high advancement. All this cannot effect much, and it is soon gone. Strength and beauty are still more fleeting. Our holiness is but a very poor thing. Times come when God shows us how weak we are, how little we can do, what vanity life is. Happy, then, are those who can glory in the Lord ; they know of a Divine Friend Who can supply their nakedness ; they trust in His praise rather than in that of men.

CHAPTER XI.

1. Out of his jealousy over the Corinthians, who seemed to make more account of the false apostles than of him, he entereth into a forced commendation of himself, 5. of his equality with the chief apostles, 7. of his preaching the gospel to them freely, and without any their charge, 13. shewing that he was not inferior to those deceitful workers in any legal prerogative, 23. and in the service of Christ, and in all kind of sufferings for his ministry, far superior.

WOULD to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly : and indeed bear with me.

What made the apostle excuse himself, nay praise himself, so much in these following chapters ? He begins now, with much reluctance, and almost against his own will, to declare his own praises. It was because he could not bear his dear friends to suspect him. He had made them Christians, he loved them much, he was leading them towards heaven, and now he felt that other men had come in between him and them. He feared lest all his work should be undone. He calls his self-vindication "folly," and excuses it much. It came out of the depths of his loving heart.

2. For I am jealous over you with godly jealousy : for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ.

This was not jealousy of other men's influence or gifts, it was fear lest his friends should miss their Saviour. He wished their hearts to belong to Christ above all. Teach us, Lord, we beseech Thee,

to put all our earthly love in its right place, and use it as a help, not a hindrance, in loving Thee. A chaste virgin soul is one which does not rest entirely on the love of any answering heart here below ; it loves without idolising.

3. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtlety, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ.

How should we hold fast to the simplicity of the gospel ! Simplicity here means single-minded loyalty ; it means putting Christ the Lord first. Indeed we adore mysteries, we see that Scripture is too deep for us to understand wholly ; indeed we reverently use sacraments and means of grace ; indeed we love and profit by earthly teachers, still we are simple-minded so long as Christ the Lord is our Master, His Life our rule, His Death our peace. If we are His in heart, then we are simple enough.

4. For if he that cometh preacheth another Jesus, whom we have not preached, or if ye receive another spirit, which ye have not received, or another gospel, which ye have not accepted, ye might well bear with him.

No, there can be no other Saviour, no other sanctifying Spirit, no new gospel. Human wisdom tries its best, but it cannot invent anything to take the place of the old Catholic faith. A believer is almost inclined to laugh when he sees the poor shams which men put up with as guides after they have lost the true Light. By God's help we will keep to the old gospel, and find that quite enough to last our time.

5. For I suppose I was not a whit behind the very chiefest apostles.

In another place the apostle says he is the chief of sinners, yet both these statements represent his real feeling. He knew that his honour was unspotted, his preaching faithful, his love genuine ; and yet in God's Presence he felt his own unworthiness, he knew that Divine mercy alone had rescued him out of ruin, and daily sustained him. He was not self-righteous, though he spoke up for himself, for he knew how far above him was God's infinite goodness.

6. But though I be rude in speech, yet not in knowledge : but we have been thoroughly made manifest among you in all things.

I am glad S. Paul could be called rude in speech. I am afraid of mere eloquence ; it was God's grace in him that did wonders, not any persuasive gifts of his own. I like him better and trust

him more when I know he had outward disadvantages, and could be looked down upon by shallow fluent orators. Moses, too, who had such great things to tell about God, was a poor speaker.

7. Have I committed an offence in abasing myself that ye might be exalted, because I have preached to you the gospel of God freely ? 8. I robbed other churches, taking wages of them, to do you service. 9. And when I was present with you, and wanted, I was chargeable to no man : for that which was lacking to me the brethren which came from Macedonia supplied : and in all things I have kept myself from being burdensome unto you, and so will I keep myself.

It was not from pride, or because he loved them less, that he would take no assistance from his converts at Corinth. But he wished to take all stumbling-blocks out of their way. He could not endure to be suspected of seeking his own profit ; it was his tenderness for their prejudices that made him so careful. Ah ! where shall we find such consideration for others ? We are all inclined to stand on our rights, and take what is our due, if not more. S. Paul put himself aside, and thought only how he could put the gospel in the most winning light.

10. As the truth of Christ is in me, no man shall stop me of this boasting in the regions of Achaia.

This is better than boasting of idleness, as some do, or of riches, or of talents, or of a high place in the world, or of men's praises. What the apostle boasted of was that he had lived as a working man. Whatever his gifts and duties, they had not, in that country at least, relieved him from the condition of working for his livelihood. To him the working man's condition seemed an enviable one, and the rich man's lot rather to be pitied. At least he would have no sympathy with idle, self-indulgent lives, in whatever rank they may be found.

11. Wherefore ? because I love you not ? God knoweth. 12. But what I do, that I will do, that I may cut off occasion from them which desire occasion ; that wherein they glory, they may be found even as we.

S. Paul then had enemies. Persons desired to weaken his influence, take away his character, put themselves in his place. He had to combat with them, and he did it by throwing aside all thought of worldly gain. He said that nothing of money or luxuries, or even comforts, should come to him for his preaching. Like sailors in a storm, he threw all else overboard, if only he and his might remain together in the ship.

13. For such are false apostles, deceitful workers, transforming themselves into the apostles of Christ.

How shall we discern false apostles from true ones, Christ's enemies from His servants? There are so many disguises, and it may be our eyes are not keen enough to pierce them. We must ask God for light to see who are true guides, and must use all means of learning the truth from Him above all. If we study the Bible, cling to the Faith which we have been taught, pray to God every day, make a good fight against sin, He will not suffer us to be deceived. He will give us wise and true teachers.

14. And no marvel ; for Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light. 15. Therefore it is no great thing if his ministers also be transformed as the ministers of righteousness; whose end shall be according to their works.

The veil will be lifted on the great day. It will be seen then who are God's messengers, and who have been pretending to be such. If Satan can dress up as an angel of light, I see that I should distrust my own pious feelings. I sometimes enjoy religion, understand Scripture, seem to draw near to God. Ah, remember that all this is not enough! God knows His true servants by their works. He does not heed the appearance of an angel, but looks underneath.

16. I say again, Let no man think me a fool ; if otherwise, yet as a fool receive me, that I may boast myself a little. 17. That which I speak, I speak it not after the Lord, but as it were foolishly, in this confidence of boasting. 18. Seeing that many glory after the flesh, I will glory also.

He did not mind appearing foolish, if only they would listen to him ; they must listen to his defence, even if he seemed to trouble them too much, and be so tedious on the subject of his own doings. He makes plenty of excuses for his vindication of himself. How grateful we should be to those silly people at Corinth ! If they had not by their suspicions forced S. Paul into speaking of himself we should have missed all these glimpses into his heart, all the great record of marvellous experiences that follow. God turns evil wonderfully into good.

19. For ye suffer fools gladly, seeing ye yourselves are wise. 20. For ye suffer, if a man bring you into bondage, if a man devour you, if a man take of you, if a man exalt himself, if a man smite you on the face.

What, even such wise people could be caught by false teachers and made puppets of, and this in the full light of apostolic teaching !

God keep us in these days free from the slavery of men's domination! Some people are at the mercy of the last folly, the last lie, the last slander that they meet with. They are caught by this fool or that, and made a prey of. Let our reverence and assent be given only where they are due. Our souls are too precious to be given away.

21. I speak as concerning reproach, as though we had been weak. Howbeit whereinsoever any is bold, (I speak foolishly,) I am bold also.

If so great and wonderful a person as S. Paul was looked down upon and thought inferior to the false teachers, shall we be amazed to find others preferred to ourselves? Is it strange that we who are very far below the apostle should come in now and then for the harsh judgments which befell him? We may be content to wait patiently for our true character to be known. Reproaches may well be our lot for awhile.

22. Are they Hebrews? so am I. Are they Israelites? so am I. Are they the seed of Abraham? so am I.

It was a great honour to belong to the chosen family, and inherit the promises made to Abraham. Gentiles had followed false religions, or lived without God; but in Jewish homes God's Word and prayers, and hopes of Christ's coming, had been handed on from age to age. We, too, have great reason to thank God if we have been brought up by our parents in God's ways. It would have been far worse for us if our childish days had been left without holy teaching.

23. Are they ministers of Christ? (I speak as a fool) I am more; in labours more abundant, in stripes above measure, in prisons more frequent, in deaths oft.

O what a marvellous life! What made Paul choose to live thus? Why was his name a warcry, his presence an offence, the whole power of Satan bent on overthrowing, wounding, killing him, if it might be? Remember, dear reader, you who lead a quiet life and value your Bible and your faith,

" If blessed Paul had stayed
In cot or learned shade.
With the priest's white attire,
And the saints' tuneful choir,
Men had not gnashed their teeth, nor risen to slay,
But thou hadst been a heathen in thy day."

*24. Of the Jews five times received I forty stripes save one.
25. Thrice was I beaten with rods, once was I stoned, thrice I suffered shipwreck, a night and a day I have been in the deep:*

God meant his great apostle to learn deep lessons from all these moments of agony and danger. How often he had been face to face with death! Cruel stripes, cracking planks, devouring waves, had all been his portion. He had wrestled with death, and hardly escaped. Be sure, if God appoints you fiery trials, that He does so in wisdom, and designs you to reap experience that you could have gained no other way.

26. In journeyings often, in perils of waters, in perils of robbers, in perils by mine own countrymen, in perils by the heathen, in perils in the city, in perils in the wilderness, in perils in the sea, in perils among false brethren;

To be a Christian then was to face constant danger. It is safe enough nowadays. How strange a contrast there is between a life like that of apostolic times, always in conflict with the world, and that which belongs to an easy, comfortable, much-honoured ministry in these days! If God should be pleased to mix up some dangers, opposition, or contempt with our cup, let us drink it thankfully. We have too many perils from within, and do not heed them, because we have so few from without.

27. In weariness and painfulness, in watchings often, in hunger and thirst, in fastings often, in cold and nakedness.

Like his Divine Master, the apostle learnt by suffering. These weary days and sleepless nights, the want of needful food, the lack of covering against the cold, had all passed into his soul, and gave a reality to his ministrations among the poor which we from our comfortable studies can never attain to. How can we feel for them if we do not know what their cares are like?

28. Beside those things that are without, that which cometh upon me daily, the care of all the churches.

This is true pastoral care, to feel the burden of other souls. Their dissensions, their failures, their trials went to the apostle's heart. How else can ministers, or preachers, or teachers do good but by bearing the burdens of those who are under their care? This pierced deeper than all his outward trials. This is true shepherd's work; the hireling only cares for the name and pay.

29. Who is weak, and I am not weak? who is offended, and I burn not?

Give me, Lord, this precious gift of sympathy. My cold heart is not touched with the thought of a lad's trials in the rough world of school or the workshop, nor with an invalid's weary days and long wakeful nights in a small close room, nor with a poor girl's striv-

ings against deadly temptation. I live my own easy life, and care not. Lord, teach me better.

30. *If I must needs glory, I will glory of the things which concern mine infirmities.*

Infirmities become matter for glory if we suffer them cheerfully and patiently, if they draw us up from earth to heaven, if they make us feel our own weakness and the great mercy of God. Perhaps we have no great strength to glory of, no great wisdom or holiness, or power of working great things ; then let our weakness supply us with matter for praise.

" What arm but Thine
Could lead so gently that I should not fear,
'Mid paths so thorny, and 'mid scenes so drear
As these of mine ? "

31. *The God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which is blessed for evermore, knoweth that I lie not.*

Let my words and thoughts be so upright that I may not fear to appeal to the Divine knowledge. Can I say, "God knows I speak perfect truth just as I feel it. God knows I seek for the welfare of souls. God knows I hate sin. God knows I love Him dearly"? Alas ! it is rather with me, "God knows I am shifty, changeable, and blown about by my passions." He knows much more against me than I myself now remember.

32. *In Damascus the governor under Aretas the king kept the city of the Damascenes with a garrison, desirous to apprehend me : 33. and through a window in a basket was I let down by the wall, and escaped his hands.*

This was the first narrow escape out of so many that S. Paul had. It began his life of adventures for Christ's sake. We admire the labours of great travellers and discoverers, the exploits of brave men by sea and land ; but oh for some sparks from the fire which lit up the apostle's heart ! He was always in danger, always overcoming difficulties, always the centre of truth and hope and peace for fresh believers. God preserved him so long to be the instrument of His great designs.

CHAPTER XII.

1. For commanding of his apostleship, though he might glory of his wonderful revelations, g. yet he rather chooseth to glory of his infirmities, xi. blaming them for forcing him to this vain boasting. 14. He promiseth to come to them again: but yet altogether in the affection of a father, 20. although he feareth he shall to his grief find many offenders, and publick disorders there.

IT is not expedient for me doubtless to glory. I will come to visions and revelations of the Lord.

S. Paul did not pour out full or frequent words about his inner life, he speaks of the privileges God had vouchsafed him only very reluctantly, and but for an instant; he is constrained to do so; he dwells much more readily on his sufferings. Remember, if God is pleased to give you a living faith, raptures of love, high thoughts of communion with Him, you will find they are best kept to yourself; it is not expedient to talk of such moments, except under grave necessity.

2. *I knew a man in Christ above fourteen years ago, (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven.*

Where was this scene, and what was it? Here we read of a man caught up into heaven; he knew not if it were literally, or in a figure, but he found himself before the throne of God, and amidst the sights and sounds of a glorified state. This earthly scene of ours had all passed away for the moment, and eternity declared itself. For fourteen years S. Paul had kept the remembrance of that wonderful experience deep in his heart; it made this world seem nothing to him.

3. *And I knew such a man, (whether in the body, or out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) 4. how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful for a man to utter.*

Human words are too weak to treat of heavenly things. They are unspeakable in our tongue, and, besides, it is not always lawful to utter them. There are secrets between God and the faithful soul which would be profaned by discovering them. What remained to S. Paul from this occasion was a deeper faith, a greater strength, a truer sense of the infinite mercy and power of God. Heaven is so near, a moment opened the door and admitted him into the

Divine Presence. Who would not fear and walk more carefully after that ?

5. Of such an one will I glory : yet of myself I will not glory, but in mine infirmities.

The person who had been so wonderfully favoured did not seem like himself. Paul in the third heaven enjoying unutterable delights scarcely seemed the same as Paul on earth, tried, and tempted, and afflicted. We sometimes feel this strange division in ourselves. Is it the same person who enjoys communion with God, who has sweet times of hope and prayer, and again who feels dry, unbelieving, cold, who is at the mercy of temptation ? Lord, be pleased to swallow up the lower self in the higher self, that we may one day be set wholly and for ever in Thy glorious Presence.

6. For though I would desire to glory, I shall not be a fool; for I will say the truth : but now I forbear, lest any man should think of me above that which he seeth me to be, or that he heareth of me.

I desire not to appear better than I am. I am impatient of the high opinion which people have of me most undeservedly. I am conscious of my own weakness and folly. God may have given me some gifts or talents, may have enabled me to do my work well, and be highly esteemed, but I know by long experience that the air of praise is not healthy for me ; conceit is very ready to creep in by any chink.

7. And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure.

Here is this glorified person brought down to the dust. He suffers from some painful infirmity, some sort of bodily ailment, it would seem, which came continually, and hindered his work very much. In spite of gifts and revelations, he had a daily trial within which left him no rest. We also have our troubles which beset us daily ; how the frail body weighs down the soul ! how near and persuasive evil seems to us ! So, too, the dear Lord and His saints had their fight to wage too.

8. For this thing I besought the Lord thrice, that it might depart from me.

This is like S. Paul's Master, Who prayed in Gethsemane thrice that the cup might depart from Him. This makes prayer earnest, when we have dark hours and enemies near. Lord, enable us at such times to fly to Thee. Satan and his messengers cannot over-

come us, for we have a Divine Friend at hand. Our dear Lord, when He sees us in agony, remembers His own sufferings, and sends us comfort.

9. And he said unto me, My grace is sufficient for thee : for my strength is made perfect in weakness. Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me.

Here is a saying of our Lord's outside the Gospels. He is still in heaven just what He was on earth, His power and love are as they used to be in Galilee of old. He spoke to the apostle's soul, we know not how, but it was a Divine Word, full of strength and peace. It is happiness to feel that the Lord Jesus is quite as compassionate, mighty, and close at hand as He was to sufferers in the days of His mortal life.

10. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ's sake : for when I am weak, then am I strong.

This is a Christian proverb, and the contrary holds true also : "When I am strong, then am I weak." When I rely on my powers of mind and body, on my money, on my character, on the high hopes and chances of life, then I am near a fall. If I feel self-reliant, it is a broken reed I trust to. No, let me keep to the right order of the words. To know my own weakness drives me to a source of Divine strength.

11. I am become a fool in glorying ; ye have compelled me : for I ought to have been commended of you : for in nothing am I behind the very chiefest apostles, though I be nothing.

He longed for their trust. This was what made him justify himself at such length, and recite all his adventures and dangers. They ought to have spared him the trouble by meeting him beforehand with trustful hearts. Let us not deserve such a reproach ; let not our dear friends who have helped us along the road of life complain that we are ungrateful, cold, suspicious towards them. We ought to remember kindnesses, and be glad to repay them with love.

12. Truly the signs of an apostle were wrought among you in all patience, in signs, and wonders, and mighty deeds.

Patience was the first mark of an apostle, though he did not lack other gifts. It was his patience that gave a convincing power to what he said ; men listened and submitted to one whose truth was manifested in giving up, in bearing pain, in choosing a poor and suffering life. When such a one spoke of heaven they believed

him. What are mighty deeds and lofty gifts in comparison with the power that patience has to win hearts?

13. For what is it wherein ye were inferior to other churches, except it be that I myself was not burdensome to you? forgive me this wrong.

Lord, give me a liberal heart; let me not desire to heap up this world's riches, much less to become richer through my Christian profession. If I am ambitious, and desire to lay hold of other minds, and influence them for good, why do not I try more gladly this method of disinterestedness? The saints found it was a great help to them.

14. Behold, the third time I am ready to come to you; and I will not be burdensome to you: for I seek not your's, but you: for the children ought not to lay up for the parents, but the parents for the children. 15. And I will very gladly spend and be spent for you; though the more abundantly I love you, the less I be loved.

Could we have resisted such a teacher as this? We might have listened unmoved to sermons, seen miracles with hearts unawakened, but when we found such a friend who loved us tenderly, and sought our good, and was only happy if he could make us believe as he did, then that would have been sufficient. Here was the spell that none could resist. Lord, teach us in these days to have it and use it.

16. But be it so, I did not burden you: nevertheless, being crafty, I caught you with guile. 17. Did I make a gain of you by any of them whom I sent unto you? 18. I desired Titus, and with him I sent a brother. Did Titus make a gain of you? walked we not in the same spirit? walked we not in the same steps?

As the saint himself was, so were his chosen friends; they also were honest and upright, they feared God, and sought for none but heavenly riches. What a great mercy it is when God surrounds our path with some true hearts, when he gives us trustworthy servants, or companions, or pupils! Thank God, there is an inflection in goodness, as there is in evil. We can catch from one another, by His mercy, right inclinations, and a spirit of love and truth.

19. Again, think ye that we excuse ourselves unto you? we speak before God in Christ: but we do all things, dearly beloved, for your edifying.

How admirably it was ordered that the Corinthians should be suspicious of S. Paul, and that he should spend so many chapters in justifying his character ! We should not have had otherwise all these glimpses into his heart, all these touches of his life. His vindication edifies us in these days no less than it edified his too jealous, doubting friends who were to read it first.

20. For I fear, lest, when I come, I shall not find you such as I would, and that I shall be found unto you such as ye would not : lest there be debates, envyings, wraths, strifes, backbitings, whisperings, swellings, tumults :

Ah, dear Lord ! even in apostolic times such evils were to be feared by believers ; much more should we be on our guard against them now. Raise us up, we beseech Thee, sons of consolation, persons filled with a spirit of peace and gentleness, who shall help to knit us together. Party spirit and all its dangers are set before us for our warning in this verse.

21. And lest, when I come again, my God will humble me among you, and that I shall bewail many which have sinned already, and have not repented of the uncleanness and fornication and lasciviousness which they have committed.

I see, then, that it is possible for grievous sinners to repent. S. Paul was shocked at such sins ; he bewailed them, but still he held out the hope of pardon. Some of us may have reason to feel that in heart and choice, if not in act, we have consented to such deadly sins. We know that our conscience is burdened with past evil, yet the saving power of true repentance may wash out all the past and restore us to communion with God again.

CHAPTER XIII.

1. He threateneth severity, and the power of his apostleship against obstinate sinners. 5. And advising them to a trial of their faith, 7. and to a reformation of their sins before his coming, ix. hecludeth his epistle with a general exhortation and a prayer.

THIS is the third time I am coming to you. In the mouth of two or three witnesses shall every word be established.

If we had been Christians at Corinth we should, according to our disposition, have been moved by the thought of the apostle's coming ; we should have felt joy, or fear, or perhaps a mixture of both ; we should, perhaps, have scarcely dared to think of so great a personage meeting us, and searching into our ways ; yet we hope to

meet him and all the Blessed before long. How can we become fit for such a gracious society?

2. I told you before, and foretell you, as if I were present, the second time; and being absent now I write to them which heretofore have sinned, and to all other, that, if I come again, I will not spare:

Jesus Christ our Lord speaks in this same tone. He is more merciful, more patient, more sympathising than ever His saints could be, but yet He comes to bring judgment no less than mercy. As He is perfect Love, so, too, He is perfect Holiness, and no unclean thing can endure His Presence. We should sometimes weigh seriously the warnings of Scripture, not merely enjoy its comforts and promises. God is a Righteous Judge.

3. Since ye seek a proof of Christ speaking in me, which to you-ward is not weak, but is mighty in you.

It is better to prove Christ's power in our conversion now, than in our overthrow at the Last Day. Be sure it is no less a Divine and supernatural power that cleanses the sinner, sustains the weak, enlightens the ignorant, than that which will one day lay open the graves and raise the dead.

4. For though he was crucified through weakness, yet he liveth by the power of God. For we also are weak in him, but we shall live with him by the power of God toward you.

Here are two very different conditions of the Lord Jesus, His mortal life of weakness, His Divine life of power. Those who humbly share with Him the suffering life will one day share the glorified life also ; yet even in this world there are glimpses of Divine power which point onwards. Heaven is close to us, ready to break forth.

5. Examine yourselves, whether ye be in the faith; prove your own selves. Know ye not your own selves, how that Jesus Christ is in you, except ye be reprobates?

Alas ! how can Jesus Christ be in us, so weak, frail, and foolish as we are? Still, if we believe, if we strive against sin, if we are able to pray, we have some proofs that He has not forsaken us. Our own faults tend to utter falling away, but our Saviour does not lightly cast us off.

*6. But I trust that ye shall know that we are not reprobates.
7. Now I pray to God that ye do no evil; not that we should appear approved, but that ye should do that which is honest, though we be as reprobates.*

Perish my name, my power, my warnings, says the apostle, let them be no more thought of, if only you give up your faults and turn to God. He would like to lay aside his power; it would not be wanted if there were no sinners to rebuke or shut out from the Church. He was as far as possible from wishing to show authority or make men afraid of him.

8. For we can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.

Truth must win at last; fables, and lies, and shams will all be seen through, and royal truth alone manifested gloriously. Let us be followers of truth in our faith and in our lives; if we stand up for truth all our days, truth will support us in the hour of death and the day of judgment.

9. For we are glad, when we are weak, and ye are strong: and this also we wish, even your perfection.

I wish that in ruling over others I had had more of this spirit. I should have done better if I had sought their good in all simplicity, and not thought so much of my own dignity. The perfection of those with whom I am should be my prayer. God in his mercy give to my dear relations and friends and household these gifts of strength and perfection. I should delight to see them all thus serving God heartily.

10. Therefore I write these things being absent, lest being present I should use sharpness, according to the power which the Lord hath given me to edification, and not to destruction.

This is the summing up of these four chapters. S. Paul here stepped down from the heights of faith, and comfort, and hope to which God had raised him while writing the first nine chapters of this Epistle. He thought when he began chapter x. of those Christians at Corinth who were careless and disobedient, and he spent himself in pleading with them. He knew well what God's truth is, and what standard of holiness is required from believers, and so he spoke plainly. God grant us to speak plainly also when need arises. We are too much like dumb dogs who cannot bark when the thief draws near.

11. Finally, brethren, farewell. Be perfect, be of good comfort, be of one mind, live in peace; and the God of love and peace shall be with you.

What a book of spiritual counsel all contained in one verse! Each of these recommendations is worth attending to. Dear friends, be sure there is nothing but Christ's gospel which can work such effects as these. How else but by faith can any of us in this world obtain perfection, comfort, peace, or a sense of Divine help?

If you read the lives of great men who have been so unhappy as to lose faith, you will miss there these precious gifts.

12. Greet one another with an holy kiss. 13. All the saints salute you.

Christians should strive for holiness and saintliness ; the world's love is but passing fancy, or bestowed for some selfish end, but those who are joined together by love for a Divine Lord have a tie which lasts on through many trials. Perhaps S. Paul's friends who loved and prayed then still pray for us and think of us where they are now in a better world.

14. The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, and the love of God, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

We adore the Holy and Blessed Trinity ; we depend for salvation on the redeeming grace of Christ, which has manifested God's love to us, and is shed abroad in our hearts by the indwelling Spirit. As the Church has believed and adored in all ages Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, Three Persons in one Godhead, so we rejoice to declare the same faith. We claim communion with the Holy Catholic Church which has perpetually maintained this faith, and will do so to the end of the world. What other light have we in this world's darkness ?

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE GALATIANS.

CHAPTER I.

6. He wondereth that they have so soon left him and the gospel, 8. and accurreth those that preach any other gospel than he did. 11. He learned the gospel not of men, but of God : 14. and sheweth what he was before his calling, 17. and what he did presently after it.

PAUL, *an apostle, (not of men, neither by man, but by Jesus Christ, and God the Father, who raised him from the dead ;)*

With Christianity something new came into the world ; a Divine gift, a heavenly life, a new birth from the grave. Human wisdom can devise, human power set in order, most things below ; but there are some efforts beyond our skill. Glory be to God for having revealed a Divine Man to us, and overcome the law of death through Him.

2. *And all the brethren which are with me, unto the churches of Galatia :*

This Epistle is full of severe blame. All other letters of the apostle begin with some words of commendation, but this alone sternly and plainly. The Christians to whom he was writing were falling away from the gospel, and burdening themselves with Jewish ceremonies in its place, so the apostle was moved by God to rebuke their folly. When we are going wrong, it is God's mercy that raises up friends to warn and reprove us.

3. *Grace be to you and peace from God the Father, and from our Lord Jesus Christ,*

Grace from above works peace in the heart. God's love bestows it, and Christ's death imparts it to us. Let us live as children of God, looking with love and obedience to our heavenly Father, Who has adopted us into His family ; and as members of Christ

Jesus, recognising the Sacrifice of our Friend, Who went through death to rescue us from the Enemy. How can we enjoy grace or peace unless we are in communion with God through Christ ?

4. Who gave himself for our sins, that he might deliver us from this present evil world, according to the will of God and our Father : 5. to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Why is this present world an evil world, that we should glorify God for being delivered from it ? It is not that the world which God made is evil, but that sin has entered and spoilt it. Sin is ever present here, and turns all things to our harm. We are walking in the enemy's territory, and need to keep a careful guard : it is not our home, that we can lie down and rest peaceably ; only our dear Master, by His love and death, drags us out of the enemy's power, and makes round our feet a space of safe ground.

6. I marvel that ye are so soon removed from him that called you into the grace of Christ unto another gospel :

This kind of change is sadly frequent nowadays, so that we scarcely marvel at it. How many desert Christ's service, and prayer, and godly living, and follow a godless life ! How many forget Divine promises, and heap up treasures for this perishing world ! Once they loved God, and lived for heaven ; now they have thrown it all up, and scoff at devotion. What a sad change is this that comes on youthful hearts, and blights their first tender growth !

7. Which is not another ; but there be some that trouble you, and would pervert the gospel of Christ.

This false gospel was no gospel at all, false coin, and so worth nothing. Even in those days there were teachers who mixed so many errors with their teaching that they perverted the whole truth. Lord, keep us free from error ; lead us into the one Faith as the Church has always received and taught it. No other but this will stand in the day of trial.

8. But though we, or an angel from heaven, preach any other gospel unto you than that which we have preached unto you, let him be accursed. 9. As we said before, so say I now again, If any man preach any other gospel unto you than that ye have received, let him be accursed.

These are plain words ; they sound terrible in our ears : it is only misery, and vanity, and harm to bring new truths into the old Faith. The Divine Saviour, the Catholic Church, the inspired Word, the life-giving Sacraments, are old, and have been always with believers. The apostle began and ended thus. We may be always learning new truths out of Scripture, and yet they must be

the old ones. I distrust profoundly any startling novelties in religion ; the old ways are the best.

10. *For do I now persuade men, or God? or do I seek to please men? for if I yet pleased men, I should not be the servant of Christ.*

This is true freedom, to be Christ's servant, and fear no one else. Let us seek courage from above that we may speak the truth boldly, without fear or favour. What deceit, and meanness, and cowardice appear in the conduct of those whose aim is only to stand well with their companions !

11. *But I certify you, brethren, that the gospel which was preached of me is not after man.*

It is not an invention of man's wisdom, but a gift of God's mercy. This is the trial of faith ; I know that men have discovered many things, learnt much from experience, invented many great arts and sciences, but I believe that our Maker in these latter days has stepped into His own world and brought us a new gift, something supernatural and Divine, something which our mere reason could never have found out.

12. *For I neither received it of man, neither was I taught it, but by the revelation of Jesus Christ.*

O heavenly Teacher, teach Thou me ! How can I myself believe firmly, how can I persuade others, unless I have learnt by secret intercourse with God ? Long years, and wide spaces of distance, cannot keep Jesus Christ from the soul. He still enters and imparts holy truths, He still reveals Himself in a way that words cannot explain.

13. *For ye have heard of my conversation in time past in the Jews' religion, how that beyond measure I persecuted the church of God, and wasted it :*

Some true Christians can tell us of a time when they abhorred religion, laughed at God's Word, tried to lead their friends away from it. They loved to scoff at holy things ; they took delight in evil. How grievous it seems now to reflect that we did so much harm, and behaved so foolishly ! miserable thoughts of those old days still come in to trouble our souls.

14. *And profited in the Jews' religion above many my equals in mine own nation, being more exceedingly zealous of the traditions of my fathers.*

So many of us have great prejudices to lay down ; we were wrapped

up in this world's wisdom ; maxims of trade or business, plans of amusement, took up all our hearts ; we were too busy to think about heaven. Thank God, it is different now. His Divine light has shone upon us, and made other lights pale by comparison.

15. But when it pleased God, who separated me from my mother's womb, and called me by his grace, 16. to reveal his Son in me, that I might preach him among the heathen; immediately I conferred not with flesh and blood:

O Divine mercy, unsought, undeserved, unthought of, which came to change the persecutor into the apostle ! Is not this a new birth, a life out of death ? No human guide could teach this lesson ; it was not the fruit of arguments, or reflections, but a light from above. Should I then fold my hands and wait idly, expecting a miracle ? No ; do God's Will as far as you know it, pray for guidance, seek His truth by what means you have. He will not deny Himself to any earnest seeker.

17. Neither went I up to Jerusalem to them which were apostles before me; but I went into Arabia, and returned again unto Damascus.

In Acts ix. 23 we hear nothing of this journey except that "many days were fulfilled" before S. Paul finally left Damascus. He went at once, after his conversion, to spend some time alone. The Divine glory of Christ, the Cross and Resurrection, the new life of the Spirit, the message of salvation to the world,—all these new truths weighed upon him ; he sought time and space to meditate upon them quietly, and learn what he had to declare.

18. Then after three years I went up to Jerusalem to see Peter, and abode with him fifteen days. 19. But other of the apostles saw I none, save James the Lord's brother.

What did the three speak of in those interviews ? What would S. Paul wish most of all to hear of from Christ's own chosen friends ? Surely it must have been the Resurrection ! It was then he learnt how the Risen Lord had been seen by Peter and by James (1 Cor. xv. 5, 7). No doubt this fortnight in the company of S. Peter and S. James planted in S. Paul's mind many recollections of the words and doings of Christ Jesus during His earthly sojourn. How he must have delighted to learn more and more about his heavenly Friend, Who had so wonderfully called him !

20. Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.

He dwells so much on this point that it was no human power

that had sent him, no human wisdom taught him. If our religion were of man's devising, it would change and perish like all other human institutions do ; but if it is Divine, then it will outlast the world. Give me, Lord, this same certainty that Thou hast taught me. Let my experience of Thee stand beyond all other proof to me.

*21. Afterwards I came into the regions of Syria and Cilicia ;
22. and was unknown by face unto the churches of Judæa
which were in Christ :*

This journey is mentioned in Acts ix. 30. Observe how many years, how many experiences, dangers, retreats, God had in store for His apostle before he was sent out fully equipped to conquer the world. Between his conversion and his solemn ordination as the apostle of the Gentiles at least ten years full of events must have come in. Let us not be surprised if God's providences seem to linger ; they take time for their working out.

*23. But they had heard only, That he which persecuted us
in times past now preacheth the faith which once he destroyed.
24. And they glorified God in me.*

Here is the best sermon. Let people say of us, Look how a quick temper has become patient, how idleness has turned to diligence, how evil words have passed away from the tongue. See what reverence, what humility, what kindness have come instead of the old careless ways. No preacher from the pulpit can persuade men anything like so forcibly as an example of this kind does.

CHAPTER II.

1. He sheweth when he went up again to Jerusalem, and for what purpose : 3. and that Titus was not circumcised : 11. and that he resisted Peter, and told him the reason, 14. why he and other, being Jews, do believe in Christ to be justified by faith, and not by works : 20. and that they live not in sin, who are so justified.

THEN fourteen years after I went up again to Jerusalem with Barnabas, and took Titus with me also.

This is the same journey that is mentioned in Acts xv. 3. How much had happened since S. Paul had last seen the other apostles ! great conquests, great dangers, the door of faith opened to the Gentiles. Those had been very fruitful years in gaining more knowledge of Christ's gospel, and power to impart it.

2. And I went up by revelation, and communicated unto

them that gospel which I preach among the Gentiles, but privately to them which were of reputation, lest by any means I should run, or had run, in vain.

He used public conferences and private conversations to further his great work, which was to free Gentile believers from the need of observing the law. We have an interest in what he did ; it was our cause that he was pleading. All his work would have been in vain if, after all that he had done, Christians had returned again to the bondage of the law.

3. But neither Titus, who was with me, being a Greek, was compelled to be circumcised :

S. Paul knew when to yield and when to stand firm. He sometimes practised Jewish rites out of condescension for the Jews who believed ; at other times he proclaimed that they were needless. I find it very hard to know when I ought to stand out and separate myself from other men's ways, and when it is best for me to yield and say nothing. I need to seek (as S. Paul did) constant guidance from above to direct my steps.

4. And that because of false brethren unawares brought in, who came in privily to spy out our liberty which we have in Christ Jesus, that they might bring us into bondage : 5. to whom we gave place by subjection, no, not for an hour ; that the truth of the gospel might continue with you.

These traitors, who crept into the camp of believers to spy what they were doing and make them slaves, were seeming Christians, whose whole object was to get Moses' law observed by Gentile converts. Acts xv. 5 records what they wanted. They put aside the essential truths of the gospel, and pressed only matters of Jewish ceremonies. S. Paul and his friends had to resist them openly ; so we must do now if any tempter would enslave us. False brethren bid us think of human respect, of keeping up appearances, of going with the stream, but God's truth has the first claim on our obedience.

6. But of these who seemed to be somewhat, (whatsoever they were, it maketh no matter to me : God accepteth no man's person :) for they who seemed to be somewhat in conference added nothing to me :

It is useful to remember that God accepts no man's person. In His eyes a wise man and a child, a king or a beggar, are alike. He judges by our hearts, not by outward appearance. God is so great that our earthly distinctions in the Church, or in the world, seem to Him as nothing. He beholds us as we really are. Even

Christ's chosen friends, the chief apostles of His Church, were but men ; they were subject to frailty, they needed His grace.

7. But contrariwise, when they saw that the gospel of the uncircumcision was committed unto me, as the gospel of the circumcision was unto Peter ; 8. (for he that wrought effectually in Peter to the apostleship of the circumcision, the same was mighty in me toward the Gentiles :)

We, too, like the apostles, might convert many if we looked more to Divine grace working in us, and less to our own gifts. God's messengers, then, whether they preached to Jews or Gentiles, felt that it was God Who spoke and wrought by them. They leaned on no strength of their own, but on power from above.

9. And when James, Cephas, and John, who seemed to be pillars, perceived the grace that was given unto me, they gave to me and Barnabas the right hands of fellowship ; that we should go unto the heathen, and they unto the circumcision.

These apostles were the pillars on which the Church was supported ; their words, their lives, their sufferings, the books they wrote, are so many pillars on which the great edifice of the Catholic faith has been raised. Each viewed the gospel in a manner peculiar to himself, and yet it was the same gospel with all. With S. James it was the perfect law, with S. Peter the fulfilment of all the old prophecies, with S. John it was the manifestation of love, and S. Paul saw in it the atoning sacrifice whereby man was reconciled to God. How great is Divine Truth, which we can always study, and never exhaust !

10. Only they would that we should remember the poor ; the same which I also was forward to do.

He needed no prompting ; the condition of the distressed Christians at Jerusalem lay very near his heart. I wish that I was always forward in helping the poor. I let many other things come first to be attended to before I remember their needs and sorrows. For at least fifteen or sixteen years of his busy life S. Paul was carrying out this charitable work. (Compare Acts xi. 29 with Acts xxiv. 17.)

11. But when Peter was come to Antioch, I withheld him to the face, because he was to be blamed.

Lord, raise us up, in times of need, brave men who shall withstand error. Christian faith and Christian liberty have been saved by bold protesters when great authorities were dumb. All through the Church's history there have been persons who lifted up their voices against prevailing corruptions. The Church carries in it a

self-regulating force. Scripture, Christ's promises, and His grace are there, and thus wanderers are recalled to the old ways.

12. *For before that certain came from James, he did eat with the Gentiles : but when they were come, he withdrew and separated himself, fearing them which were of the circumcision.*

S. Peter, then, was not infallible ; he made a great mistake. Still it was not in his preaching, but in his conduct. He who had been taught by God to call no man common or unclean, yet was now afraid to own that truth. He feared men, just as he had done long ago in the hall of Caiaphas. We observe here that the Holy Spirit's influence, and S. Peter's great gifts and high position in the Church, left him still man, subject to weakness, liable to fall.

13. *And the other Jews dissembled likewise with him ; insomuch that Barnabas also was carried away with their dissimulation.*

Even S. Barnabas, who was full of the Holy Ghost and faith, and who had so stoutly maintained the liberty of the Gentiles, lacked courage now to maintain what he believed. All our freedom rested on S. Paul only ; he had been raised up for this very occasion ; he stood against the Church as well as the world.

14. *But when I saw that they walked not uprightly according to the truth of the gospel, I said unto Peter before them all, If thou, being a Jew, livest after the manner of Gentiles, and not as do the Jews, why compellest thou the Gentiles to live as do the Jews ?*

Here is a severe rebuke, and bestowed on the first of the apostles. Yet we do not find S. Peter resented it or answered again. He was content to learn from S. Paul, and to amend his own practice. Here is a point on which we can copy him. If we have made mistakes as he did, we can be glad to receive correction, and ready to follow it. Never think yourself above learning your duty.

15. *We who are Jews by nature, and not sinners of the Gentiles, 16. knowing that a man is not justified by the works of the law, but by the faith of Jesus Christ, even we have believed in Jesus Christ, that we might be justified by the faith of Christ, and not by the works of the law : for by the works of the law shall no flesh be justified.*

How can man be justified except by faith in Christ ? All the works which the law commanded cannot make us good ; our acceptance

must come from above ; we cannot appear before God unless Christ's purity, Christ's love, Christ's mercy, covers our defects ; unless His Death is between us and the severity of Divine judgment. He only can pay our debts. To feel that we cannot stand before God in our own worthiness is at first great fear, and then afterwards great comfort when we come to see Who our strength is.

17. But if, while we seek to be justified by Christ, we ourselves also are found sinners, is therefore Christ the minister of sin ? God forbid.

Christ broke down the barrier. He taught that legal cleansings could not touch the soul ; He brought in a better sacrifice ; He taught that all men are children of one heavenly Father. If we are wrong in counting every soul precious, in treating every one with love, then we may put the fault on Him. If it is wrong to make friends with the humble, to be hopeful of the vile, to be on terms of brotherhood with men everywhere, it is Christ our Lord Who has misled us ; we are taking His way.

18. For if I build again the things which I destroyed, I make myself a transgressor.

It was confessed folly to teach that Christ had done away with the law, and then try to make men observe it again. No one would profit by such teaching as that, which pulled down with one hand and set up with the other. Some Christians are as inconsistent nowadays, their profession on Sunday goes to destroy sin, and their behaviour on Monday to build it up again.

19. For I through the law am dead to the law, that I might live unto God.

Moses' law was no lasting home. Faith passed through it and rested in Christ. The law itself stirred up conscience, and claimed obedience, but it gave no full satisfaction to the heart that longed for inward purity and entire reconciliation with God. Divine life in the soul could not be fully awakened till God's dear Son had come on earth : then all the old dispensation began to break up ; the house was finished, so the scaffolding must now be taken away.

20. I am crucified with Christ : nevertheless I live ; yet not I, but Christ liveth in me : and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved me, and gave himself for me.

What is my portion in this beautiful verse ? I fear to use such lofty words. I dare not say that my life is wholly swallowed up in Christ's Life. Am I not foolish, and vile, and weak ? I feel

temptation. I have to die. Still, if I believe in One full of holiness, Who has loved me, and died for my sake, I possess something that no one can take away. I can scarcely say that I am inwardly one with Christ, and yet His condescension is so great that He cares for me, His majesty does not despise me, His love makes me worthy.

21. I do not frustrate the grace of God : for if righteousness come by the law, then Christ is dead in vain.

Why were the Agony and Bloody Sweat, the Cross and Passion? Christ did not go through all this for nothing. Unless sin had been an intolerable burden, and holiness out of our reach, and the heavens all dark to man, God's Son would not have taken our nature, and suffered such things in it. I recognise in His Passion the exceeding love of God. I know not how else to obtain pardon and new life except through the Cross.

CHAPTER III.

1. He asketh what moved them to leave the faith, and hang upon the law? 6. They that believe are justified: g. and blessed with Abraham. 10. And this he sheweth by many reasons.

O FOOLISH Galatians, who hath bewitched you, that ye should not obey the truth, before whose eyes Jesus Christ hath been evidently set forth, crucified among you?

Christ crucified is evidently set forth among us in the sacrament of His love. There we show forth His Death; we plead His Sacrifice; we repeat the solemn words of His Last Supper; we spiritually take that Body and Blood which was once for all offered for us. Who has bewitched us, that we so turn to the ways of sin again, and forget that gracious Master Who died for our redemption?

2. This only would I learn of you, Received ye the Spirit by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith?

In the old law fire came down from heaven to consume offerings, or punish transgressors, but in the gospel it descends to kindle love and renew life; its work is to purify and sanctify our nature. We are happy to live in Christian times when God's Spirit is given, only let not our faults drive Him away.

3. Are ye so foolish? having begun in the Spirit, are ye now made perfect by the flesh?

How many of us begin in the Spirit, receive grace, show faith, pray to God ; and yet finish with the flesh by going after our own pleasure, and letting our religion be a mere outward show !

4. Have ye suffered so many things in vain ? if it be yet in vain.

Lord, give us perseverance ; let not our old prayers, and tears, and experiences, let not Thy mercies and our hopes be all in vain ; let us not throw away our profession. We stood out against evil, we loved to pray and to hear Thy Word ; let not all this end in nothing.

5. He therefore that ministereth to you the Spirit, and worketh miracles among you, doeth he it by the works of the law, or by the hearing of faith ?

Yes, miracles were wrought in those days, and it was faith in Christ which performed them. If it were God's Will, such might still be found among us ; the records of Christian work among heathens in all ages are not without such marvels. When the Divine gift of faith was given to the world, God was pleased to recommend it by the display of marvellous powers ; the faith is still the same, though the marvels are inward and spiritual only.

6. Even as Abraham believed God, and it was accounted to him for righteousness. 7. Know ye therefore that they which are of faith, the same are the children of Abraham.

Faith is older than the law ; it is the perpetual mark of God's true children ; the saints have all walked by that road ; they despised time and sense, they lived by unseen realities, they trusted in One Who was their Friend and Guide, and would accomplish His Word, even though all seemed adverse. God approves of this temper, and bestows grace and glory on it.

8. And the scripture, foreseeing that God would justify the heathen through faith, preached before the gospel unto Abraham, saying, In thee shall all nations be blessed.

The promise to Abraham that a blessing should come to all the world through a descendant of his was a gospel in short compass ; it told of what Christ our Lord should do ; it looked right onward to these days. That is the way of Scripture ; it foresees, its words apply now as well as then ; it has a message to us no less than to the saints of old time.

9. So then they which be of faith are blessed with faithful Abraham.

True Christians look forward to being blessed with peace in Abra-

ham's bosom ; they hope to be with the holy Patriarchs in that place where is no weeping, sorrow, nor heaviness ; they trust to hear one day those most sweet and comfortable words, "Come, ye blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the beginning of the world."

10. *For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse : for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them.*

It is impossible to keep God's law perfectly ; and how can we atone for our past misdoings ? Righteousness is high and lofty ; we are frail, and liable to fall : neither the law of nature, nor that of Moses, could sufficiently strengthen our weakness, or show us how to blot out past transgressions. Apart from Christ, we are fearful lest we have only been heaping up a great mountain of sin ready to fall on our heads.

11. *But that no man is justified by the law in the sight of God, it is evident : for, The just shall live by faith.*

Here is a comforting word, here is true life. Let me, Lord, find it ever abiding in myself. Some live without faith, that is a sad condition ; and some against faith, believing, and yet contradicting their faith in their works ; there are many Christians who thus throw away the benefits of Christ's Death.

12. *And the law is not of faith : but, The man that doeth them shall live in them.*

The law was upright and holy ; it set before men a standard of good life, it required obedience, it promised God's blessing on those who performed its precepts. But alas ! I find in myself no love or holiness ; I am altogether weak, foolish, vile ; my life falls below my standard in every way. I must look out of myself to some one else if I would find true life.

13. *Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us : for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree :*

Christ died in the extremity of shame ; His dead Body hung on the Cross like that of an executed criminal. He shrank from no drop of disgrace for my sake. Who can raise me up save He Who has descended so low for me ? When the curse of broken promises and neglected duties, and souls led astray, threatens to fall on my head, I put Christ's shameful Death between myself and God's wrath.

14. *That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles*

through Jesus Christ ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith.

The curse came on One, that the blessing might come on all. The law failed to save the Jews, that the gospel might come and save both Jews and Gentiles. God's Spirit plants faith in us, that we may seek Christ, and receive His fulness. Let us learn from that Divine Spirit how to believe and love more and more truly all our life through.

15. *Brethren, I speak after the manner of men ; Though it be but a man's covenant, yet if it be confirmed, no man disannulleth, or addeth thereto.* 16. *Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many ; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ.*

How ancient is the gospel ! it has stood ever since God made the promise to Abraham that all nations should be blessed in his seed. The changes of the world have been innumerable, the progress of mankind immense ; yet God, His blessing, and the family to whom it was made, did not alter ; the Divine purpose was worked out in spite of all that came between. God's word stands sure now as it did then ; His promises will be justified by the result.

17. *And this I say, that the covenant, that was confirmed before of God in Christ, the law, which was four hundred and thirty years after, cannot disannul, that it should make the promise of none effect.*

God made a covenant with man that He would give him blessing, and an inheritance, and His mercy and favour. He had no need of us, yet He was pleased to unite us to Himself ; He honoured mankind by entering into these relations with them. O Lord, let me not fall again to the level of the beasts that perish, now that Thou hast lifted me up from the dust, and made me a member of Thy Son, and an heir of Thy Glory.

18. *For if the inheritance be of the law, it is no more of promise : but God gave it to Abraham by promise.*

Keeping the law ever so strictly cannot deserve the promise ; it is all of God's infinite love, not our earnings. Yet this does not encourage sloth, for if God is so good, I am bound to live and die for Him. I cannot earn the promise, do what I will ; yet I might miss it if I forgot my Master's service.

19. *Wherefore then serveth the law ? It was added because of transgressions, till the seed should come to whom the promise*

was made; and it was ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator.

Saints waited patiently for the promised Deliverer; the terrors and glories of the law, voices of God's angels, the wisdom and mighty works of Moses, did something to unfold God's righteousness, but they were not fully satisfied; they longed to hear more of God than could be learnt from the law; His love and mercy remained veiled till the promise should come true.

20. Now a mediator is not a mediator of one, but God is one.

In the law there were two contracting parties, God and the Jewish people, between whom Moses acted as mediator, arranging the terms of the covenant. In the gospel God speaks directly to the soul; He is all, and we are nothing; in the person of His dear Son He comes to each of us, and offers us the whole treasure of His mercies.

21. Is the law then against the promises of God? God forbid: for if there had been a law given which could have given life, verily righteousness should have been by the law.

It is true still that law cannot give life; only love can do this. Bear in mind that righteousness comes of love planted in the heart; it is no mere outward observance of rules, but an inward life, springing from Divine grace, and strengthened by daily prayer.

22. But the scripture hath concluded all under sin, that the promise by faith of Jesus Christ might be given to them that believe.

Scripture says, "Cursed is he that confirmeth not all things that are written in the book of the law to do them." Scripture says, "In Thy sight shall no man living be justified;" but now

"The ancient law departs,
And all its terrors cease,
For Jesus makes with faithful hearts
A covenant of peace."

23. But before faith came, we were kept under the law, shut up unto the faith which should afterwards be revealed.

The law was a wall which restrained man's wandering steps; a lock and key under which he was kept safe from multiplied transgressions; it laid hold on man's fears, and subdued him by terror. But now God's Spirit has let us out of prison, it is no longer constraint but love that guides our way; we believe in a Divine Friend, and delight to walk as He walked; otherwise we should be no longer Christians but Jews out of date.

24. Wherefore the law was our schoolmaster to bring us unto Christ, that we might be justified by faith.

Have we thus found our Reconciler, our Enlightener, our true end? God designed all His general providence over mankind, and all His particular providences towards ourselves, to bring us to Christ's Feet; He alone can give us what we want. Without Him we may seem great and happy, but something is lacking to us.

25. But after that faith is come, we are no longer under a schoolmaster.

We are now under God's guidance; He gives us, if we ask Him, wisdom to walk aright; He enlightens our conscience to follow His leading. We must not fall back again into spiritual infancy. All true Christian instructors should make it their object to lead their charges to seek counsel from God, not merely to keep them under their own direction. There is such a thing as a counterfeit childlike spirit,

26. For ye are all the children of God by faith in Christ Jesus.

Let us then live as God's children should do; let our character and life show Whose we are. Christians are not only Abraham's children, but God's; they have a right of access to their Father's Presence, can tell Him their needs, and expect His loving care for them.

27. For as many of you as have been baptized into Christ have put on Christ.

This glorious robe is Christ's righteousness; it covers our defects, it is all pure and spotless, it alone makes us fit to come into God's Presence. Let us not by unbelief or sin strip off that robe; let us appear, still wearing it, before the Judgment Throne.

28. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

God is no accepter of persons; Jew and Gentile are one before Him; rich and poor, old and young, wise and foolish are alike His. If this is so, how strangely mistaken I have often been in treating some so respectfully, others so coldly and unkindly. I have quite forgotten that all this world's distinctions will be over in a moment, and the true worth of each soul made known as it is. Christ has died for each, and so made all alike precious.

29. And if ye be Christ's, then are ye Abraham's seed, and heirs according to the promise.

Jewish birth and legal rites are no more needed to constitute members of the chosen people ; it is widened out to all who belong to Christ Jesus. They inherit the noble memories, and hymns, and prayers of God's ancient people ; all that was good in Jew or in heathen is theirs now. They see that this inheritance comes from their Master, and is therefore meant for them ; they should feel full of thankfulness for gospel blessings.

CHAPTER IV.

1. We were under the law till Christ came, as the heir is under his guardian till he be of age. 5. But Christ freed us from the law : 7. therefore we are servants no longer to it. 14. He remembreth their good will to him, and his to them, 22. and sheweth that we are the sons of Abraham by the freewoman.

NOW I say, *That the heir, as long as he is a child, differeth nothing from a servant, though he be lord of all ; 2. but is under tutors and governors until the time appointed of the father.*

A minor's person and property are under control ; he has to obey, before he can learn to give orders and manage his property himself. A time of discipline is appointed for him till he attains man's estate. Thus the Jewish dispensation was a minority in spiritual things. God's people did not yet enjoy their full inheritance, but were in training for it ; they learnt to keep rules, so as to prepare to receive grace. Thus, too, each Christian must be taught to live by rule, to obey, to discipline himself, before he can live by faith.

3. Even so we, when we were children, were in bondage under the elements of the world :

We must not go back to the elements again ; God's service is perfect freedom. To do right only in order to get a reward for it, or to avoid punishment, or to keep an outward conformity, is but children's obedience ; our Master wants more than that from us. He requires faith and love.

4. But when the fulness of the time was come, God sent forth his Son, made of a woman, made under the law,

This was the glad tidings of great joy which knit heaven and earth together again ; all the ages had been waiting for this. Our Divine Saviour was pleased to come by the way of birth and infancy, the

way of Jewish rites, the common road of humiliation. He chose no royal glory for His first advent.

5. To redeem them that were under the law, that we might receive the adoption of sons.

He was born a man to raise all men to God ; He was born under the law to set all men free ; He passed under the doom of death to recover us from the destroyer. Let me never, dear Lord, forget what I owe to Thy mercy ; let the coldness and unbelief of so many only make me more earnest in my profession. If I forget Thy tender love and mercy in redeeming me, I shall indeed be dead to all goodness.

6. And because ye are sons, God hath sent forth the Spirit of his Son into your hearts, crying, Abba, Father.

Now we have communion with God ; now His Spirit dwells in us ; now we learn to pray ; now we are preparing for heaven. True prayer is the heart's cry, it is a sense of our own weakness and our Father's love ; it is a cry for ourselves and our dear ones oppressed by this sad world, yet trusting to an encompassing Divine Mercy. Lord, teach us to pray ; let Thy Holy Spirit dwell in us, and make our prayers acceptable.

7. Wherefore thou art no more a servant, but a son ; and if a son, then an heir of God through Christ.

This verse strikes to my conscience. Do I serve God out of love, not only out of fear ? Do I live for a heavenly inheritance, not for the mere successes of this perishing world ? My Father, my home, my reward are not here ; I have many blessings now from God, and yet these are only foretastes of glory.

8. Howbeit then, when ye knew not God, ye did service unto them which by nature are no gods.

Idolatry was a bondage of the soul ; instead of the Living God, false or cruel counterfeits of Him mocked the heart's longings. What shall we think of those who, after knowing God's goodness, cast Him off again, and take up with the pleasures of sin ? These are as degrading, unsatisfying, and false, as were the idolatrous rites of old.

9. But now, after that ye have known God, or rather are known of God, how turn ye again to the weak and beggarly elements, whereunto ye desire again to be in bondage ?

From Christians these foolish people wished to become Jews again ; they reversed God's order, and desired to go to school after they had attained man's estate. The Jewish law seemed so worthy in

their eyes, that they would fain observe and press it after Christ had made them free. We ought to grow in grace, to press onward; God would have us no more remain children in understanding, but become perfect in His love and knowledge.

10. *Ye observe days, and months, and times, and years.*

Is the observance of the Lord's Day or of the Christian festivals condemned by this verse? May not we mark the year as it passes both by its Christian and its natural anniversaries? No; what was wrong with the Galatians was that they insisted on observing also, as of necessity, the old Jewish days; they kept Sabbaths, new moons, passovers, so that the apostle feared lest their Christian faith should disappear under all this, and they become mere Jews again.

11. *I am afraid of you, lest I have bestowed upon you labour in vain.*

Lord, give us true hearts to labour for our brethren, and pray for them, and watch over their estate; and do Thou bless our labours with Thy grace, without which we can do nothing. All is in vain without Thee; but by Thy mercy even fruitless labours are turned to good at last.

12. *Brethren, I beseech you, be as I am; for I am as ye are: ye have not injured me at all.*

S. Paul had laid aside the yoke of the law; he had sought out these Gentiles and converted them; he entreated them to stand fast in the same freedom. Here he is pleading by the dear memories of that happy time when he had first won their hearts. As he formerly gained them to Christianity by his preaching, so he would now keep them fast there by his written words.

13. *Ye know how through infirmity of the flesh I preached the gospel unto you at the first. 14. And my temptation which was in my flesh ye despised not, nor rejected; but received me as an angel of God, even as Christ Jesus.*

Most of us when we are ill seek only for rest and alleviations of pain; but the great apostle had taken the opportunity of being detained in Galatia on account of his health to speak for his Master. His zeal for souls triumphed over his bodily weakness. No wonder his words seemed Divine; no wonder he could speak of heavenly truths in a way that transported his hearers.

15. *Where is then the blessedness ye spake of? for I bear you record, that, if it had been possible, ye would have plucked out your own eyes, and have given them to me.*

How little human feelings can be trusted! Who could have been converted more promptly? What greater joy, or peace, or assurance could there have been than these Christians enjoyed when S. Paul preached to them? Yet now it had all melted away, and they found their delight elsewhere. Lord, guard us against our own shallow wayward hearts; let our weakness be established by Thy power.

16. Am I therefore become your enemy, because I tell you the truth? 17. They zealously affect you, but not well; yea, they would exclude you, that ye might affect them.

Lord, take away from us all hatred and prejudice, and whatsoever else may hinder us from godly union and concord; keep us ever faithful members of Thy Church, wherein we have, not mere human wisdom to guide us, but the ancient faith which was from the beginning.

18. But it is good to be zealously affected always in a good thing, and not only when I am present with you.

Who shall teach us the secret of perseverance? Who shall comfort us in our failures, and enable us to keep on working for our Master, though so little seems to come of it? Often we feel that we have toiled all the night and taken nothing: where are the old happy successful hours when all went well?

19. My little children, of whom I travail in birth again until Christ be formed in you, 20. I desire to be present with you now, and to change my voice; for I stand in doubt of you.

What a noble object to live for, that Christ should be formed in other hearts! This is indeed worth all manner of trouble, and persuasion, and patience, if we can see the resemblance of our Lord appearing at last in those whom we love. That perfect image of holiness, of love, of wisdom, is indeed too great to be altogether expressed in any human character, yet some rays of it may be reflected, only it is Divine grace, not human skill, that can accomplish this.

21. Tell me, ye that desire to be under the law, do ye not hear the law? 22. For it is written, that Abraham had two sons, the one by a bondmaid, the other by a freewoman. 23. But he who was of the bondwoman was born after the flesh; but he of the freewoman was by promise.

Abraham's household was the Church of God at that time. Therein God was worshipped, His Name honoured, His promises treasured up; what happened there has meanings for us. In the son of the bondmaid Hagar, born first, and thinking he would be the heir, yet

cast out at last, we see those Jews who would not accept Christ, but clung to the yoke of the law ; they preferred their bondage to freedom. In Sarah's son Isaac, born after special promise, and coming into Ishmael's place, we see those believers, whether Jews or Gentiles, who trusted in Christ's salvation, and were ready to give up the law now that the promise had come true.

24. Which things are an allegory : for these are the two covenants ; the one from the mount Sinai, which gendereth to bondage, which is Agar. 25. For this Agar is mount Sinai in Arabia, and answereth to Jerusalem which now is, and is in bondage with her children.

Are we not still in bondage though Christians ? What are the daily necessities of our life, the weight of sinful inclinations, the fear of death, but a bondage ? Do we not still groan under the yoke, and long for freedom ? Nay, Christ has done much to free us ; we serve God out of love as His children ; we take trial and sorrow, and even death, as His gracious Will for our perfection ; our sins are pardoned by His precious Blood. We have a freedom which believers under the old covenant knew not of ; only, dear friends, let us remain free, let not sin make us slaves again.

26. But Jerusalem which is above is free, which is the mother of us all. 27. For it is written, Rejoice, thou barren that bearest not ; break forth and cry, thou that travailest not : for the desolate hath many more children than she which hath an husband.

This is the Holy Catholic Church throughout the world, not limited to one nation, not centred in one place, but in every place and country bringing forth children to God. In Holy Baptism this new life is begun ; then we were received for God's own children by adoption, and incorporated into His Holy Church ; there God made us heirs of everlasting life. May His Divine mercy perfect what was there begun in us !

28. Now we, brethren, as Isaac was, are the children of promise.

We trust in God's mercy, knowing what His eternal promises are. Of ourselves we have nothing to trust to, and we are encompassed by dangers on every side ; yet our Father's power and love are such that we know He can bring us safely through, and fulfil all the promises in His everlasting kingdom. Isaac had promises of Canaan, and of other great things to come ; but Jesus Christ has promised heaven to us very clearly and plainly.

29. But as then he that was born after the flesh persecuted him that was born after the Spirit, even so it is now.

Ishmael was jealous of Isaac, so those who desire to live to God may reckon on meeting annoyances from the world. Christ and His saints have given us this warning ; we cannot expect our road to be all peace here ; but everlasting peace will soon make us forget the world's rubs.

30. Nevertheless what saith the scripture? Cast out the bondwoman and her son : for the son of the bondwoman shall not be heir with the son of the freewoman.

How bold the apostle was ! He saw that the Jewish law must perish. God gave him eyes to see more than most believers then saw ; they fondly thought that the law could go on side by side with the gospel, but he saw they were incompatible ; one must give way. Let us with equal confidence look forward to the casting out of all that now is worldly, erroneous, narrow, or bitter, from the Church of Christ.

31. So then, brethren, we are not children of the bondwoman, but of the free.

O great Deliverer ! we thank Thee for our freedom, and pray that we may keep it. We will not be slaves to the flattery or threats of men ; we will not be bound by sin ; money and pleasure are not our masters ; we acknowledge no lordship over us but Thine, which is a service of delight.

CHAPTER V.

1. He moveth them to stand in their liberty, 3. and not to observe circumcision : 13. but rather love, which is the sum of the law. 19. He reckoneth up the works of the flesh, 22. and the fruits of the Spirit, 25. and exhorteth to walk in the Spirit.

STAND fast therefore in the liberty wherewith Christ hath made us free, and be not entangled again with the yoke of bondage.

From the bondage of evil habits, or of cowardice, or of unbelief, Good Lord, deliver us. We have been set free by Thy mercy, and would fain live as free citizens of Thy glorious kingdom. We wonder at the folly of the Galatians after they had become Christians, subjecting themselves needlessly to the yoke of the law ; but ours would be no less if we took up with the world's service after knowing Thine.

2. Behold, I Paul say unto you, that if ye be circumcised, Christ shall profit you nothing.

God wants us altogether ; He cannot be satisfied with half a heart. Christ would not share with Moses, nor the gospel with the choice of Judaism. It would be throwing away the substance for the shadow if we were to profit much in other studies, and yet find our religion had become a mere lifeless form.

3. For I testify again to every man that is circumcised, that he is a debtor to do the whole law.

This was a burden indeed for them to bind on their backs. They feared the annoyances which might befall them as Christians, and so sought to make things easier by shielding themselves under the name and appearances of Jews, but they found they had chosen the harder way. To speak the truth plainly, and come forward boldly on Christ's side, is easiest in the end ; it frees us from many entanglements.

4. Christ is become of no effect unto you, whosoever of you are justified by the law ; ye are fallen from grace.

Ah, what an infinite loss ! they would no more share in the benefits of Christ's Death or the blessings of His Spirit ; they had put their trust elsewhere. Let me, O Lord, seek for righteousness only in Thee. Apart from Thy merits I cannot be justified ; there is all my trust.

5. For we through the Spirit wait for the hope of righteousness by faith.

We do not seek any outward distinction from others, nor profess ourselves to be righteous, nor think to win the gift of righteousness altogether in this world ; it is not here, it is in God, and more to be hoped for than enjoyed as yet, and it comes of grace, by God's infinite mercy, not of our deserving. We pray for it, long for it, fly from all that would be inconsistent with it.

6. For in Jesus Christ neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision ; but faith which worketh by love.

This is true faith ; it is no mere profession, no mere persuasion, but a living union with Christ, that shows itself in good works. To dispute about justification or assurance is of little profit ; but to believe, and trust, and love, is infinite comfort and delight. In the last part of this verse the whole Christian life is briefly summed up for us to examine ourselves by it.

7. Ye did run well ; who did hinder you that ye should not obey the truth ? 8. This persuasion cometh not of him that calleth you.

You were running well ; your ready faith, your love, your zeal for Christ's service, all this was good ; whence comes this strange turning aside ? Ah ! this sad inquiry concerns many of us. Why was it we were once so zealous, so brave in our religion, and yet are now so extremely lukewarm ? what has happened to change our resolutions ?

9. A little leaven leaveneth the whole lump.

Once looking into a bad book may corrupt our thoughts ; once hearkening to silly flattery or light words may ruin our character ; once giving way to evil temper may upset our comfort. Do not say it is only for once, and will so soon be over ; that is just the way that Satan persuades us, and then mocks at our downfall.

10. I have confidence in you through the Lord, that ye will be none otherwise minded : but he that troubleth you shall bear his judgment, whosoever he be.

How many have troubled the Church by false doctrine, and so wrought infinite harm to themselves and their disciples ! Lord, grant that our present reflections on Thy Holy Word may bring us peace, and do no harm to any one.

11. And I, brethren, if I yet preach circumcision, why do I yet suffer persecution ? then is the offence of the cross ceased.

The offence of the Cross means the doctrine of salvation through faith in Christ crucified ; no reliance on the ordinances of the law could stand along with this. If Christ saves us, then it is no position, no outward reputation, no feelings or powers of our own that will be sufficient ; it must be His precious Blood washing out our stains, and His perfect Sacrifice making up for our defects. This is not an acceptable doctrine to the world.

12. I would they were even cut off which trouble you.

This troubling or upsetting of Christians was grievous to the apostle ; he would have his friends walk towards heaven quietly and peacefully. He put before them the heavenly Jerusalem, Christ's law, the Spirit's gifts, the character of love and holiness, and behold they had almost left all this and taken up with the decaying rites of the old covenant. God keep us from such disturbances and errors.

13. For, brethren, ye have been called unto liberty ; only use not liberty for an occasion to the flesh, but by love serve one another.

Christians are free from the Jewish law, and from slavish fear, and from the chain of sin, but they are bound to love God and their neighbours. They must learn to join together perfect freedom and dutiful service ; their Divine Master came as a servant, and pleased not Himself.

14. For all the law is fulfilled in one word, even in this ; Thou shall love thy neighbour as thyself.

God asks of us love only ; if we have that we fulfil His holy law, but it must be a sincere and hearty love. We must be as ready to procure all knowledge, helps, and comforts for our brethren as we are to get them for ourselves ; we should study their interest as we do our own. This is a searching rule.

15. But if ye bite and devour one another, take heed that ye be not consumed one of another.

Jealousy, and envy, and unkindness have sharper teeth than hungry beasts ; they spare the flesh, but fasten on good characters, and peace and mutual confidence, and tear them all to shreds. When people sit down to talk scandal about their neighbours, they all rise up so much the worse, no one has got any good at all from the conversation : it is a transaction where every one loses.

16. This I say then, Walk in the Spirit, and ye shall not fulfil the lust of the flesh.

This is the secret of Christian life, to walk by the guidance of God's Holy Spirit. The apostle does not mean that we should remain always on our knees waiting for some sudden illumination, but that we should ask God to show us the way, seek it by studying His Word, follow it by a godly and upright life. Be in earnest to learn of God and do His Will, then all evil things will fall before you, they will have no power to hurt you.

17. For the flesh lusteth against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh : and these are contrary the one to the other : so that ye cannot do the things that ye would.

This is my own sad experience. I feel all manner of foolish and vile desires ; again, by God's mercy, I have thoughts of holiness, I long to be better than I am. What help have I except in Thee, O Blessed Lord, Who wast Thyself tempted, and didst overcome ! It is a strange inward conflict, which lasts all my life through ; only, O Lord, let me not be utterly overthrown.

18. But if ye be led of the Spirit, ye are not under the law.

Our confirmation hour brought near to us that Blessed Spirit with His gifts. How little we have remembered our heavenly Guide, how often we have strayed away from His path ! yet He is a fountain of grace to all those who seek Him.

19. Now the works of the flesh are manifest, which are these ; Adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, 20. idolatry,

witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulations, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, 21. envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like : of the which I tell you before, as I have also told you in time past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the kingdom of God.

Such deadly sins, either in thought, or word, or deed, close heaven's door against us. Whatever may be our position here, whatever our religious profession, yet if the All-seeing Eye behold in us wilful deadly unrepented sin, we cannot be fit for God's Presence. How many live on in sin without remembering that hell is open beneath them, and the gate of heaven shut above them !

22. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, 23. meekness, temperance : against such there is no law.

Here is a list of sweet and heavenly tempers, here is the character that is in favour both with God and man. But such fruit cannot be raised by human skill from the barren soil of our heart ; it needs that Divine Grace should be the gardener. No mere respectability, no mere ambition, or desire of standing well with men, can reform the heart.

24. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh with the affections and lusts.

We were signed with the Cross at baptism in token that we took the side of Christ crucified. We may have a daily cross to bear, daily combat, daily shame, daily pain, yet in the end the victory is certain if our faith lasts. Just as Christ bore the Cross, and let His Body be nailed to it and die slowly, so our old sinful nature is doomed. God is doing away with it ; one day the work will be all done.

*25. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit.
26. Let us not be desirous of vain glory, provoking one another, envying one another.*

Here are three faults to avoid, conceit, unkindness, and jealousy. God's Holy Spirit bids us be humble-minded in ourselves, gentle to our inferiors in age or station, dutiful to those above us. This 26th verse is an excellent rule of behaviour for any one who wants to walk uprightly through this world of troubles.

CHAPTER VI.

1. He moveth them to deal mildly with a brother that hath slipped, 2. and to bear one another's burden : 6. to be liberal to their teachers, 9. and not weary of well doing. 12. He sheweth what they intend that preach circumcision. 14. He glorieth in nothing, save in the cross of Christ.

BRETHREN, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness ; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted.

Here is much good counsel how to behave when you see a brother fallen into sin : 1. Make what excuse you can for him, remembering that he may have been overtaken or surprised. Temptation is strong, as you would feel if you had been in his place. 2. Restore him to his right path by good advice and encouragement, telling him of his duty and of the danger of sin. 3. Do this in meekness, feeling for him, and entering into his troubles. A dictatorial, self-righteous way of admonishing men does very little good. 4. Draw a wholesome lesson for yourself out of what has passed, remembering your exceeding weakness and your own need of God's grace to stand upright.

2. Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.

"The world's a room of sickness, where each heart
Knows its own anguish and unrest."

Lord, raise up for us sons of consolation who can enter into their brethren's griefs, and lighten them by love.

3. For if a man think himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceiveth himself. 4. But let every man prove his own work, and then shall he have rejoicing in himself alone, and not in another.

If you have got so far as to know your own wretchedness and nothingness, do not look down upon others who think themselves to be something. You must not expect to be treated with reverence, considering what you really are in God's sight. Compare your actions with those of God's true saints and servants, and you will see what little worth your life has been.

5. For every man shall bear his own burden.

I must bear my own sins on the dread Judgment Day, yet I can

lighten that burden by bearing the consequences of others' faults with them, by sharing in their sorrows and helping them to repent. Still neither could I bear my own burden, nor that of my brethren, unless my dear Lord had laid them both on His own shoulders first.

6. Let him that is taught in the word communicate unto him that teacheth in all good things.

If God's ministers are sufficiently provided for in this country, yet there are many missions where teachers and taught alike labour under great want. Consider those many noble souls who have gone out into distant lands to preach God's Word, and have to bear every extreme of climate, every trial of fatigue and danger, lacking so many of the comforts which home affords, and be liberal and hearty in your gifts to missionaries.

7. Be not deceived ; God is not mocked : for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap. 8. For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption ; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting.

“ The deeds we do, the words we say,
Into still air they seem to fleet ;
We count them ever past, but they shall last ;
In the dread judgment they
And we shall meet.”

9. And let us not be weary in well doing : for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not.

What matters it if the winter and spring seem long, if the harvest delays, we know it will come at last. The eternal summer will bring to ripeness all good thoughts and deeds that have been sown here ; let us only persevere, let us never be weary of supporting any good work that God has once intrusted to us.

10. As we have therefore opportunity, let us do good unto all men, especially unto them who are of the household of faith.

Opportunity disappears if we do not embrace it. Any call of distress, any sorrow we can relieve, any good work suggested to us, is a merciful opportunity given us by God's grace of obtaining an eternal recompence. The needs and miseries of the world are faith's opportunity ; all the bitter turns into sweetness thus.

11. Ye see how large a letter I have written unto you with mine own hand.

We should like to look at the first copy of this Epistle with S. Paul's own handwriting on it, yet it is much more interesting and im-

portant to study the peculiarities of his character than of his penmanship ; that copy has been worn out long ago, but no ages will wear out the love, courage, and devotion that are stamped on every part of his letters and sayings.

12. *As many as desire to make a fair shew in the flesh, they constrain you to be circumcised ; only lest they should suffer persecution for the cross of Christ.* **13.** *For neither they themselves who are circumcised keep the law ; but desire to have you circumcised, that they may glory in your flesh.*

Christians who were circumcised and content to live as Jews escaped a good deal of annoyance. The Jews excused their faith if they kept it to themselves ; it was a bold profession of being free from the Jewish law that brought persecution on them. Give us, Lord, courage to declare ourselves on Thy side ; we often are afraid to persevere against the contempt of men.

14. *But God forbid that I should glory, save in the cross of our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom the world is crucified unto me, and I unto the world.*

The Cross of Christ is the measure of the world ; what will not fall in with that is wrong for a Christian. To be humble, to give up, to look beyond this world, to bear patiently, are settled parts of our duty now that the Lord of Glory has died on the Cross for us. There is something different in the value we put on life when we have once gazed steadily on Christ crucified.

15. *For in Christ Jesus neither circumcision availeth anything, nor uncircumcision, but a new creature.*

There are two creations, then, the old and new : the old creation drew us out of the dust and set us upright in God's Image to rule His world ; the new creation raises us out of sin and darkness, forms spiritual life within, makes us inheritors of the world to come.

16. *And as many as walk according to this rule, peace be on them, and mercy, and upon the Israel of God.*

The literal Israel looked for earthly promises, boasted of ceremonial laws, considered themselves better than the Gentiles. But God's true Israel seeks only God's righteousness, leans on His grace, looks for a land of promises elsewhere ; they follow a better guide than Moses, God's own Son is their Lawgiver.

17. *From henceforth let no man trouble me : for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus.*

These were the marks of wounds and blows he had received while preaching the gospel. He regarded them as an honour, they reminded him of the sufferings of his dear Master, in which he was privileged to share. He took all troubles and disgraces as a part of Christ's Cross ; he did not complain that the Lord had recompensed his faithful service with so much of this world's dishonour.

18. *Brethren, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.*

What a peaceful, tender farewell to this Epistle, in which he had spoken so severely ! We see that he loved his friends in spite of all their faults ; he prayed for them, he remembered their kindness to him, he wished to do them good. All this is the salt of reproof ; thus it is kept sweet and profitable.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE EPHESIANS.

CHAPTER I.

1. After the salutation, 3. and thanksgiving for the Ephesians, 4. he treateth of our election, 6. and adoption by grace, 11. which is the true and proper fountain of man's salvation. 13. And because the height of this mystery cannot easily be attained unto, 16. he prayeth that they may come 18. to the full knowledge and 20. possession thereof in Christ.

PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, to the saints which are at Ephesus, and to the faithful in Christ Jesus :

In this Epistle S. Paul unfolds to us wonderful things about God's Will, and also admirable teaching about our own duties. With him both go together. He sets forth first the mysteries and marvels of Divine grace, and then draws forth rules for our own behaviour as Christians. Lord, may our own studies on this Epistle be according to the mind of Thy apostle ! Keep us from mere barren wonder or curious inquiry ; may the contemplation of Thy truth, so gloriously declared here, only make us more holy, faithful, obedient members of Thy Church !

2. Grace be to you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.

Grace is daily bread for our journey, like manna in the wilderness. Peace is scarcely to be found here on earth. It is rather that untroubled joy which will come to us in heaven, like the new corn on which the Israelites fed when they got to Canaan. What does it matter being poor in this world's goods if we have sufficient grace to do our duty here, and one day eternal peace ? Those gifts are worth more than all that this world can give.

3. Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ,

who hath blessed us with all spiritual blessings in heavenly places in Christ:

The ancient law spoke chiefly of temporal blessings and an earthly home. Those who kept it prospered ; but the gospel speaks of the Cross, of suffering, of self-denial, and yet with all this of a much deeper blessing than the Old Testament knew. God's wisdom may have denied us or taken from us this world's blessings, and yet left us all the richer in unfailing joys. Those who keep fast hold on Jesus Christ find infinite joy and comfort in Him.

4. According as he hath chosen us in him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before him in love :

Here is unveiled the eternal purpose of the Father. In the depths of eternity He willed that we should be Christians, should believe in Jesus Christ, should possess the graces of the gospel. Such a Divine purpose, such a wealth of mercy poured out, should encourage us to live up to our holy calling. Infinite worlds, laws unsearchable, mysteries of creation and providence without number, were in God's counsels, but this also, that I should be a regenerate soul, able to love and serve Him daily.

5. Having predestinated us unto the adoption of children by Jesus Christ to himself, according to the good pleasure of his will,

Certainly in ourselves there was nothing to deserve Divine love. It has come to us wholly in and for Jesus Christ our Saviour. He is God's Son by nature, and we are adopted to be His brethren and share His holiness. Why is all this wealth of mercy showered on us? why have so many ages and persons known it not? Here we must be silent ; we can only rest on that Will of God which is beyond our understanding.

6. To the praise of the glory of his grace, wherein he hath made us accepted in the beloved.

Here is unveiled the glorious Person of Jesus Christ, God's Son, Who is the new Head of our race, and has won for us God's favour and mercy. Words cannot express the holiness, the love, the inward majesty of the Lord Jesus, in Whom our nature stands upright, and the Fall has passed away. Contemplating this, we sing glory to God on high, and join with the heavenly host in magnifying the mercy of our God.

“ This through endless ages
Men and angels sing.”

7. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his grace ;

This is one redemption, that from guilt ; a second is spoken of in verse 14. This is past ; that second one is still to come. We were by nature slaves to sin, prisoners under a heavy sentence, blind and destitute in soul, foul and evil in God's sight ; but the Blood of our dear Lord sets us free, pardons us, gives us light, and grace, and purity. Who can limit the power of that most precious Blood in washing away our stains ?

8. Wherein he hath abounded toward us in all wisdom and prudence ;

"O loving wisdom of our God ! " If all creatures by their framework, their properties, their life and growth, tell wonderful tales of that all-disposing wisdom which set them in order, how much more does the kingdom of grace reveal ? The Incarnation, the Atonement, the Church and Sacraments, form another kingdom with its own laws, its depths and heights, which declares God's wisdom and love more powerfully than Creation could. Lord, give us eyes to trace Thy dealings both in the visible and invisible worlds.

9. Having made known unto us the mystery of his will, according to his good pleasure which he hath purposed in himself : 10. that in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather together in one all things in Christ, both which are in heaven, and which are on earth ; even in him :

This is the mystery of the Holy Incarnation. It accomplished the types, fulfilled the prophecies, satisfied yearning hearts. It brought reconciliation for sinners, grace for the weak, light to the darkened ; it unites angels in heaven and men on earth in one hymn of praise to God's Son, to Whom they owe all. God become man is now the Head of Creation, and heaven and earth form His kingdom. May we be willing subjects of it ; may we adore His holiness and love Who is our Friend and yet our God.

11. In whom also we have obtained an inheritance, being predestinated according to the purpose of him who worketh all things after the counsel of his own will :

Here is another mystery, our election to be Christians. Why have we been made members of Christ and children of God ? why have we a promise of everlasting life ? Many men, many nations, have not heard of all this. What is the reason that God has thus favoured us with His choicest gifts ? Indeed we cannot answer this question ; it is hid in the depths of God's wisdom. We know

that He is righteous, and that His providence will deal justly with all. Therefore we are content to leave this grave question of the inequality of gifts and callings in His Hands Who knows all about it.

i2. That we should be to the praise of his glory, who first trusted in Christ.

Jews hoped for the Christ before He came ; then they heard His preaching and saw His marvels. The Church was first formed from among them. O great privileges of that nation ! Yet how many were utterly indifferent to all this,—nay, despised and abhorred Christ the Lord and His Church ! If my privileges as a Christian are greater than theirs were, let me beware of a like downfall.

i3. In whom ye also trusted, after that ye heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation : in whom also after that ye believed, ye were sealed with that holy Spirit of promise,

Afterwards Gentiles were brought into the Church of Christ and received gifts of grace there. God brought them back from darkness and error, and shewed them the way of life. His mercy has renewed this gracious work a second time for many of us who were Christians, and yet lifeless, unbelieving ones, but have now been touched by God's love, and brought to feel our need of Divine mercy. We have heard and believed now, thank God for it. May we never again loose our hold on truth.

i4. Which is the earnest of our inheritance until the redemption of the purchased possession, unto the praise of his glory.

Here is unveiled the Blessed Spirit of Grace, Whose gifts mark us out as Christians, Who gives us strength, and light, and peace, Who new-fashions us after the likeness of God's Son. And yet all this new creation of the soul is imperfect here. It is but begun ; one day God will accomplish all His work for us both in soul and body. Glory be to Him for His mercies and gifts here below ; but what shall we feel when we have to recount in heaven all that He has done !

i5. Wherefore I also, after I heard of your faith in the Lord Jesus, and love unto all the saints, i6. cease not to give thanks for you, making mention of you in my prayers ;

Yes, we hold our faith and love from God. They are not of our own contriving or keeping. We ought to be thankful to Divine mercy for them, and careful to pray that He will continue and increase them. Even if I do believe and love now, yet I ought to do so more earnestly ; I need to advance in God's ways, I must never forget to pray for His help. Some who once believed and

loved are grown careless now, because they neglected to pray. Help me, Lord, to pray, and give me a share in the prayers of Thy holy Church.

17. That the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give unto you the spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of him :

This world is so full nowadays of sciences and discoveries that God's truth is disregarded. How few study Scripture carefully ; how few give time to spiritual reading ! And yet the heart has its own knowledge, which is more profitable than mere human learning. God teaches those who will learn of Him in simplicity. Scholars in His school profit more for life and death than great philosophers by all their inventions.

18. The eyes of your understanding being enlightened ; that ye may know what is the hope of his calling, and what the riches of the glory of his inheritance in the saints,

A hope greater than this world's happiness, a wealth more abundant than royal treasures, such become manifest to believers. Earthly hopes may deceive, and earthly stores waste, but it matters not, my inheritance is elsewhere. My God will not deceive that hope which I have rested on His promise. He has laid up for me a treasure which no losses can touch.

**19. And what is the exceeding greatness of his power to usward who believe, according to the working of his mighty power,
20. which he wrought in Christ, when he raised him from the dead, and set him at his own right hand in the heavenly places,**

The Resurrection and Ascension of Christ glorified is the issuing forth of that same Divine power which quickens dead souls to life. It is marvellous beyond words that the Body of Mary's Son should come forth alive from the sepulchre, and be free from the doom of death for ever. His Body was flesh and blood like ours. He was truly crucified, and died in agony on the Cross ; but now His Body is glorious and undying, and a spring of life to us. Yes, this is the same Divine power that turns hard stony hearts to love and pray, that breathes new life into the spiritually dead. Our cold, sinful hearts have felt a spark of that mighty life.

21. Far above all principality, and power, and might, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come :

O Lord Jesus, Thou art God as well as man ; in earth and heaven Thou art Lord, and those who trust in Thee will never be confounded. What mighty forces there are on earth, what heavenly

beings in the invisible world, I cannot reckon ; mysteries encompass me on every side, yet I cling with a sure faith to my Lord and Redeemer. Whatever there is in earth or heaven, it cannot come between me and Him.

22 And hath put all things under his feet, and gave him to be the head over all things to the church, 23. which is his body, the fulness of him that filleth all in all.

All blessings are from God through Christ ; therefore a soul that is cast off from its Divine Master by deadly sin is withering up. God's graces do not reach it. Sin bars the door against Christ's gifts, and shuts us up into our own nothingness and vanity, which is soon exhausted ; only in Christ Jesus, and through union with Him, can we enjoy the soul's true life.

CHAPTER II.

1. By comparing what we were by 3. nature, with what we are 5. by grace: 10. he declareth, that we are made for good works; and 13. being brought near by Christ, should not live as 11. Gentiles, and 12. foreigners in time past, but as 19. citizens with the saints, and the family of God.

AND you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins ;

There are two deaths : one, that of the body, which we have often seen, and shall one day ourselves experience ; a grave and awful change, of which we understand little, but know that it awaits us before long : and the other is the death of the soul by sin ; that happens when faith and love die away, and God leaves the soul, and only foul passions and evil thoughts remain. Such a soul is in reality dead ; Divine life has left it ; corruption rules there. God keep us from such a condition.

2. Wherin in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience :

We have an enemy near us, suggesting evil to our minds, putting occasions of sin before us, ruling over the hearts of sinners. O Lord, how watchful we should be, how careful not to neglect our prayers, not to give the devil an advantage ! Indeed the hosts of evil are mighty, but Thy power and love are able to make Thy soldiers win. I am not afraid of all the power of the enemy, if Thou art with me.

3. Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind ; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.

Would that this verse was not true of many professing Christians, that they had not thrown off their baptismal grace, enslaved themselves anew to Satan, gone back to that condition out of which God's mercy had once delivered them ! What folly and misery it is to choose the devil's service, and bondage to our own passions, instead of the easy yoke and light burden of our Divine Master ! He has opened to us a heavenly state, let us only stand fast in it.

4. But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love where-with he loved us,

Instead of misery comes mercy, instead of wrath comes love. Nature is indeed full of hard things, the world unsatisfying, evil, mighty ; yet one who believes in Jesus has assurance of God's love. Remember, apart from the gospel, we are in darkness about God ; we can scarcely trace His love. All around are terrible indications of wrath as well as of goodness ; it is only in His dear Son our Saviour that Divine compassion is clearly revealed.

5. Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved ;)

We share in Christ's work ; His Resurrection and glory are ours too ; our bodies and souls are renewed by union with the Second Adam, as they were tainted by descent from the first Adam. Easter morning was the breath of new life for mankind. There it was made clear that God is greater than sin and death. If Jesus Christ rose to new life on that day of days, then I can rise with Him to a holy life here and heaven at last.

6. And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus :

This is a Christian's life, in the apostle's point of view ; he shares in the new life, the power, the glory, of Jesus Christ. Because his dear Friend and Lord, Whose he is, and Whom he loves, is now immortal and exalted, his heart is in heaven too. What a contrast between the calling and the disposition of most Christians ! How is it that we are so tied to the earth, when our Master, our treasure, our hope, are all in heaven ?

7. That in the ages to come he might shew the exceeding riches of his grace in his kindness toward us through Christ Jesus.

Here are riches which never waste; they suffice for man's needs through all ages of the world. Material wealth grows and diminishes again; it is subject to time, and chance, and robbery; but God's mercies to us in Christ form an inexhaustible treasure, which our hearts can always draw from. God's dear Son, His merits, His Word, His Sacraments, remain with us for our perpetual comfort.

8. For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: 9. not of works, lest any man should boast.

All the work of salvation is God's plan, God's gift. He has framed it, and applies it to us. Indeed we are individually brought near and accept it, yet we could not earn it nor apply it to ourselves. Lord, I know that of myself I am nothing. Thy mercy has created and regenerated me, upholds me in the Christian life, and guides me on my heavenly way. Let my will be wholly subject to Thy Divine Will.

10. For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them.

Yes, any good that there is in me belongs to my God only; He should have the praise of it. If others chance to praise me for any upright, or compassionate, or diligent conduct, let me at once ascribe the praise to my heavenly Master. He alone gave me the thought of doing right, helps me through with it, forgives its shortcomings; I contribute little of my own except selfishness and conceit. This is only too true. May I think of it every day, and so get rid of that silly vanity which is a proof how miserably imperfect I am.

11. Wherefore remember, that ye being in time past Gentiles in the flesh, who are called Uncircumcision by that which is called the Circumcision in the flesh made by hands;

Once they had been outside the Church of God; they knew not God's worship nor the true life of the soul. In heavenly things all was dark to them. If any baptized Christian has yet spent years in ignorance and deadly sin, and now awakes to feel what his condition has been, let the thought of past downfalls make him more humble and thankful now. He remembers those bygone days not to take pleasure in the thought of evil, nor to distrust the sovereign mercy that has pardoned him, but yet to keep himself humble. Such he once was, and but for God's grace might be again.

12. That at that time ye were without Christ, being aliens from the commonwealth of Israel, and strangers from the

covenants of promise, having no hope, and without God in the world :

The Jews expected a Redeemer ; they had a visible Church, heavenly promises, a hope of eternal life, a sense of God's Presence with them. What spiritual treasures ! how poor was the rest of the world lacking all these ! Let us not fall back by sin into the homeless, hopeless, godless state of heathen souls ; it would be tenfold worse for us to have known God's blessings, and then cast them away.

13. But now in Christ Jesus ye who sometimes were far off are made nigh by the blood of Christ.

I am nigh to God, His child, His servant, His redeemed creature ; I sit at His table, I enjoy His grace, I take my wants and cares to Him. Though I do not see Him as yet, He is close to me, and I hope to behold His face ere long. My Redeemer has wrought this astonishing exaltation for me ; may my behaviour suit with such high and glorious privileges. How would uncleanness, or lying, or evil words, befit one who has been brought so near to God ?

14. For he is our peace, who hath made both one, and hath broken down the middle wall of partition between us ;

What was this wall of partition which kept Jew from mingling with Gentile ? Is it not the whole Jewish system of customs and devotions ? All these were peculiar, and not meant for others to join in. The ways and prayers of the Jews belonged all to themselves ; mutual dislike reigned between them and Gentiles. Now indeed Christ has done away with all that exclusion. He has reconciled both parties with each other and with God. His work was to take away divisions ; let us beware of renewing such among believers.

15. Having abolished in his flesh the enmity, even the law of commandments contained in ordinances ; for to make in himself of twain one new man, so making peace ;

God has delivered us from the multitude of Jewish ordinances ; from the old separation which parted Jew and Gentile ; from the heavy burden of our sins, which made us His enemies. He has knit believers together in one Church ; given them like gifts of grace, like helps towards heaven. Why should we let little jealousies, little suspicions, trouble the peace He has wrought ? The greatness of Divine mercy towards us should incline us to be very forbearing with our brethren.

16. And that he might reconcile both unto God in one body by the cross, having slain the enmity thereby :

Christ the Reconciler drew man and man together, and also man and God. That Cross of shame on which His enemies thought to destroy Him destroyed only our own guilt and misery. Jesus rose triumphant, leaving behind Him this world's malice ; it could touch Him no more. O Lord, mortify and kill evil in me ; let it not awake again to destroy Thy saving work.

17. And came and preached peace to you which were afar off, and to them that were nigh.

God's Son came preaching peace to the world through the means of His Church. This Divine preaching still goes on ; we do not hear our Saviour literally speaking, but His ministers declare His saving work, and bid all men be partakers of it. This holy preaching of Divine peace has never ceased since the day of Pentecost ; my own ears have often heard it, my heedlessness has too often neglected it.

18. For through him we both have access by one Spirit unto the Father.

Through the work of Jesus Christ, by the help of His Holy Spirit, we approach our God ; we adore that Blessed Trinity Which has made, redeemed, and sanctified us. Power, wisdom, and love are round us. Lord, let no temptation have power to separate us from this heavenly communion ; with Thee we are safe ; apart from Thee, what is there but darkness ?

19. Now therefore ye are no more strangers and foreigners, but fellowcitizens with the saints, and of the household of God ;

God's Church has enlarged its boundaries now ; it is open to all nations ; it offers mercy and peace to believers everywhere. His holy city has its laws and rights, its rejoicings, its warfare ; let me be ever its true citizen, its faithful soldier. What have I to do with Babylon ? I must remember that either one side or the other must claim me ; either Jerusalem or Babylon, either God's true home or the world's deceiving show.

20. And are built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ himself being the chief corner stone ; 21. in whom all the building, fitly framed together, groweth unto an holy temple in the Lord : 22. in whom ye also are builded together for an habitation of God through the Spirit.

Here is a great cathedral, wonderfully built. What a foundation ! Christ the Lord's own work first, and then that of His saints. What antiquity ! it has been building ever since the world began. What proportion and ornamentation ! such as God only could devise. What a worship goes on there ; what treasures are kept

there ; what reverence and holiness reign there ! It is not finished yet, but every day adds fresh stones, fresh ornaments to it ; only the Judgment Day will reveal it fully complete. May I rest in my place as a living stone in its walls, content to be moulded according to the Will of my God.

CHAPTER III.

5. The hidden mystery, 6. that the Gentiles should be saved, 9. was made known to Paul by revelation : 8. and to him was that grace given, that 9. he should preach it. 13. He desireth them not to faint for his tribulation, 14. and prayeth 19. that they may perceive the great love of Christ toward them.

FOR this cause I Paul, the prisoner of Jesus Christ for you Gentiles,

For this cause, he is going on to say, I pray for you all (see ver. 14). Knowing what great things God has done, what a holy calling you enjoy, I beseech Him you may have grace to see it and live up to it. Only, meanwhile, he is led to speak of his own share in the proclamation of grace. And yet he was a prisoner ; all his noble activity and zeal was burdened by a chain. God's ways are so. His saints use chains and sickness and adversity to set forward His work. When all earthly power deserted them, they were strongest then.

2. *If ye have heard of the dispensation of the grace of God which is given me to you-ward :*

Lord, enable all Christian ministers to feel these words. Let them see that their holy calling is a gift of God, and that they are intrusted by Him with treasures of grace and knowledge. If they only seek their own profit or honour, their eyes will become blind to all their Master's gracious purposes for them. It is God Who gives the message, and it is for the benefit of souls. Teachers have to receive it gratefully, and deliver it faithfully.

3. *How that by revelation he made known unto me the mystery ; (as I wrote afore in few words, 4. whereby, when ye read, ye may understand my knowledge in the mystery of Christ)*

God made known to S. Paul these great truths by special revelation, but He has now intrusted them to Holy Scripture, where we may all read them. This kind of knowledge is fruitful, and makes us peaceful here, and glorious in heaven. May we profit in this, however much or little of this world's learning falls in our way. To

know God, and Christ and His Church, and how to live and die, is knowledge enough.

5. Which in other ayes was not made known unto the sons of men, as it is now revealed unto his holy apostles and prophets by the Spirit;

God's providence has placed me in gospel times, when I can clearly read those truths of which saints in old times had only faint glimpses. I might have been brought up in heathen darkness, or Jewish shadows, but I enjoy the faith of a Christian. The glorious company of the apostles, and the goodly fellowship of the prophets, join to tell me about Christ Jesus.

6. That the Gentiles should be fellowheirs, and of the same body, and partakers of his promise in Christ by the gospel:

This is our calling, to be heirs of God's promise, members of Christ's Body, partakers of the Spirit's gifts. True religion is no more confined to one nation, but open to all mankind. God offers His grace and mercy beyond words, gifts for this world and the next, to all who will seek Him. O wide and free mercy of my God ! O deaf ears and blind eyes that turn away from it !

7. Whereof I was made a minister, according to the gift of the grace of God given unto me by the effectual working of his power.

This is the secret of ministerial power, to feel that God is with us. It is not our own gifts, nor our own strength, but infinite love and power from which we can draw. Too many Christian ministers put themselves forward, rely on themselves, and so miss the Divine effects which God has worked through those who have been willing instruments in His hands.

8. Unto me, who am less than the least of all saints, is this grace given, that I should preach among the Gentiles the unsearchable riches of Christ ;

A touching humility and tenderness fill the apostle's mind when he reflects that this great work of proclaiming the salvation of the world has been committed into his hands. He has been made, though frail and feeble for such a task, the herald of the universal gospel. What a contrast between his weakness and the great truths he utters, the infinite results which hang on his mission ! What am I, O God, that I should lead any soul to heaven ?

9. And to make all men see what is the fellowship of the mystery, which from the beginning of the world hath been hid in God, who created all things by Jesus Christ :

Redemption by Christ, the Holy Catholic Church, Christian faith and hope, had been concealed from many ages. God at last brought them forth from His storehouse. No doubt much is still hidden from us. He has many other revelations to make. Shall we not see one day how nature and grace and glory all make up one Divine plan? We see but the skirts of His perfections, yet what we do see is enough to make us adore Him.

10. *To the intent that now unto the principalities and powers in heavenly places might be known by the church the manifold wisdom of God, 11. according to the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord:*

God's wisdom is manifold, His purpose eternal, His dear Son the true Light! It seemed strange that mankind was let fall into such darkness; that the true religion was then limited to one people; that so long a time elapsed before the Saviour appeared. So there is much now that seems to us incomprehensible in God's ways. Yet, dear friends, have patience, remember He has all eternity in which to work out His designs. Only believe in and love Jesus Christ, and you will get to learn that all is well.

12. *In whom we have boldness and access with confidence by the faith of him.*

It would be a grand thing, we reckon, to have access to some earthly sovereign, be able to see his splendour, understand his policy, ask his favours. Is it not greater to have access to our God, to know that His merciful ears are always open to us, that His dear Son is our best Friend? Why do we not use more frequently the privilege of coming to His Table? Why do we not more readily and confidently tell Him our needs? All who love Jesus Christ find a welcome at the heavenly court.

13. *Wherefore I desire that ye faint not at my tribulations for you, which is your glory.*

If we see God's saints in trouble, broken down by sorrow, suffering pain of body and distress of mind, or despised by the world, shall we think their God has forsaken them? No. He lays such crosses upon them for His wise ends, to purify and perfect them, to give them hearts of more sympathy. A good Christian may meet with such disasters; I acknowledge it is so, but I will not give up my trust in God's good providence, my assurance that faith will turn out well at last. Nay, I see the power of Christ even in the sufferer's weakness.

14. *For this cause I bow my knees unto the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, 15. of whom the whole family in heaven and earth is named,*

My Father ! Here is a name that implies love and protection and provision for my wants, and on my part suggests a dutiful, grateful, obedient behaviour. All earthly fatherhood, whether of our actual parents, or of those whom God has in any way set over us, is derived from that relation between our Creator and us. All creatures in heaven and earth are fed by their heavenly Father ; they obey His laws, reflect His glory. Should man alone be a disobedient child ?

16. That he would grant you, according to the riches of his glory, to be strengthened with might by his Spirit in the inner man ;

“ Grant that the inner man may grow
In faith and grace each day,
Rooted in Thee our hope, although
The outer must decay.
Grant that when earthly sense grows weak,
My faith may still be strong,
That when my tongue no more can speak,
Thy grace may be my song ! ”

17. That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith ; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love, 18. may be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height ;

Redemption is so broad, it takes in all ages, countries, conditions of men. So lasting, it reaches from eternity to eternity, and knows no end. So deep, it rests on the impenetrable abyss of God's counsels, unsearchable by us. So high, it is out of reach of man's power or the devil's malice to reverse. Let our minds adore the wisdom and mercy of God, and always find it a fruitful subject of contemplation. Love opens the mind to this kind of knowledge.

19. And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

S. Paul prayed thus for his friends. Whether they were

“ Sick or healthy, slave or free,
Wealthy, or despised and poor,”

was of much less importance, only he longed for them to feel something of their Master's love, and be filled with graces and gifts accordingly. O Lord, I too desire this for myself and my dear ones. May we learn, as far as is possible for us, what a Saviour we have in Thee, and what treasures of grace and mercy Thou hast for Thy chosen. Hear my prayers as may be best, for Thy mercy's sake.

20. Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

This verse magnifies Divine grace. It is far above all the ideas we can frame. It is infinite power guided by infinite love. We feel it within us, drawing our hearts upward, overcoming sin in us ; we discern it without, disposing all things for good ; yet in this life it is but a fragment of God's ways that we can discern.

21. Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

This life is but a passing scene, eternity awaits us. All that sphere is beyond our present comprehension. Our imagination, which is all of earth, fails to picture the heavenly life. Yet we know this, whatever ages come, whatever wonders heaven has to shew, that God, and Christ, and we ourselves, and the memory of what we have been, will remain the same. Those who have loved good, have suffered for truth's sake, have made God their Friend here, will retain for ever their sense of redeeming love and what it has done for them.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He exhorteth to unity, 7. and declareth that God therefore giveth divers 11. gifts unto men, that his church might be 13. edified, and 16. grown up in Christ. 18. He calleth them from the impurity of the Gentiles, 24. to put on the new man, 25. to cast off lying, and 29. corrupt communication.

I THEREFORE, *the prisoner of the Lord, beseech you that ye walk worthy of the vocation wherewith ye are called,*

A prisoner for Christ's sake, as S. Paul was, rejoices in his condition. It is no shame to him to be treated like his Master. The more humiliating, intolerable, grievous his condition (as men judge), the more he is filled with inward comfort. What freedom or honours of this world could have enabled the apostle to exhort his brethren so powerfully as he did from his prison ? We who read this letter share in his counsels. He speaks to us, bidding us live according to our faith.

2. With all lowliness and meekness, with longsuffering, forbearing one another in love;

Here are three excellent gifts, lowliness, meekness, and longsuffering, but they are all parts of the same temper of humility. One who feels his own nothingness and God's great mercy is lowly, knowing what he is by nature, what is his condition in God's sight ; he is meek, does not fire up at affronts, does not talk much of his wrongs, but is willing to forgive ; and he is patient, putting up

with others' defects, shewing love to them, and helping them along the heavenly road. Lord, I believe in Thy Divine mercy, and feel my need of it hourly. May I apply this thought to my own relations with my brethren.

3. Endeavouring to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.

We should take trouble to preserve peace. It is worth while taking pains for. Some trouble in writing letters, in paying courtesies, in giving up our own way, in forbearing our rights, some self-denial even in religious acts (if we are likely thus to offend others) is here recommended. I wish I was humble enough to behave always courteously and tenderly, instead of scattering sharp words. What I think to be independence is mostly pride and selfishness.

4. There is one body, and one Spirit, even as ye are called in one hope of your calling;

The Holy Spirit dwells in the Catholic Church of Christ, inspires life and love and hope into the hearts of believers. O Blessed Spirit, let me ever be a living member of the Church ; pour into my cold, careless heart some new life ! If other ties of this earth are real, much more my union with those who have the same faith, the same hope with me.

5. One Lord, one faith, one baptism,

The Lord Jesus Christ is the object of our faith, the Master to Whose service we were bound in Holy Baptism. His Cross was there marked upon us. We shew forth continually His redeeming acts ; we recognise His great love. May He ever find in me a faithful servant, one who does not bring shame upon Him by disobedience. This world has lords and masters, but a Christian knows of One Who is above all.

6. One God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.

God Himself is over us, and with us, and in our hearts. His providence is our stay. We depend upon Him for time and for eternity. O my God, I cannot see more than the skirts of Thy glorious perfections, clouds and darkness are around Thee here, but I know that one day all Thy ways will be justified ! With my whole heart I adore Thee and give Thee thanks.

7. But unto every one of us is given grace according to the measure of the gift of Christ.

Our place and its duties are assigned to us by our Divine Master, and He would have us discharge them suitably. If He has set

us in a humble place, and bidden us serve rather than rule, praise be to His holy Name. We accept this cheerfully, knowing that we are fitter for it. No doubt, if He called us higher, He would give strength to perform His bidding. Yet the lowest place is safest. All works, and gifts, and duties are from Him, and to be used under His eye.

8. Wherefore he saith, When he ascended up on high, he led captivity captive, and gave gifts unto men.

O mighty Conqueror, let my soul be of the number of those captives whom Thou hast won and redeemed ! When slaves and prisoners are taken captive afresh, it is for their deliverance ; they look forward to their capture ; then they get free. Let this happy experience be mine. I have too long served in Satan's chains, and desire to know my Saviour's easy yoke and light burden instead.

9. (Now that he ascended, what is it but that he also descended first into the lower parts of the earth? 10. He that descended is the same also that ascended up far above all heavens, that he might fill all things.)

He descended to our mortal condition, to our sufferings and humiliations, last of all to the Death of the Cross ; then He went, as other men do, among the spirits of the departed. He has known all this sad road of our human decay ; but He ended it by a victory, by a return in majesty, by His glorious reign full of love and power. Now He fills our hearts with grace, the earth with His Name, heaven with His glory. May we, O dear Lord, be led gently down to the grave leaning on Thy hand, sure of a happy return again.

11. And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers;

Apostles founded the Church, and governed it while they lived. Prophets explained God's Word. Evangelists were missionaries to the heathen. Pastors and teachers ministered the Word and Sacraments to congregations of Christians. We who live now inherit the apostles' faith, are governed by their authority continued in the Bishops of the Church ; we listen to God's truth unfolded by preachers ; we see missionaries sent to heathen lands ; we have pastors who guide and help us. What God has once framed and quickened, the living fabric of His Holy Church, remains till the Judgment Day.

12. For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ:

What a grievous thing if Christians spoilt instead of perfected,

ruined instead of built up ! God has set me where I am, not to indulge my own vanity, not to please or enrich myself, but to be my brethren's servant, to raise them up from sin, and lead them gently along the way of holiness ; their souls, their faith, their enlightenment are in my care.

13. Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ :

How much my soul needs to grow ! so little faith, such cold love, such scanty knowledge. When shall I come to reflect my Lord and Master in my ways ? He is the Standard set forth for humanity ; measuring ourselves by Him, we see how dwarfed we are, yet He helps us to grow up to heights of love which of ourselves we can never reach.

14. That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive ;

What care it needs to steer a straight course amidst the storm, escape the cheats, overcome the persuasions. Up to the end of life we are always in danger of error. Many all round us are being led away ; may I remain a faithful Catholic Christian all my days, confessing the old faith, clinging to the Word of God, using the Church's means of grace. This is the only safe way.

15. But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ : 16. from whom the whole body fitly joined together and compacted by that which every joint supplieth, according to the effectual working in the measure of every part, maketh increase of the body unto the edifying of itself in love.

Both truth and love are wanted, neither would do apart ; but it is Christ only Who gives these graces, and makes us persevere in them. His Church is the school in which we learn the heavenly life. Do not think a selfish prosperous life, taken up with self-culture and intellectual luxury, will make you a perfect soul. No, that is a frightfully one-sided and stunted growth ; prayer, and active love, and a knowledge of life's sorrows and mercies, is a much better education.

17. This I say therefore, and testify in the Lord, that ye henceforth walk not as other Gentiles walk, in the vanity of their mind,

Thanks be to God for making me a Christian ! I have the light of

His Word to go by, and am not left only to my own weak reason for guidance. Let me leave unprofitable speculations, and cling with all my heart to the true God, Who has manifested Himself to me in the gospel ; here is reality, here is life. Whatever else is dark or clear, the words and actions of Jesus my Lord are set forth to me as a sure guide.

18. Having the understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God through the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart :

This spiritual darkness, ignorance, hardness of heart, was the state in which many heathens were content to live ; they knew not God, nor cared to know Him. Are there not among nominal Christians some in the same condition ? O Lord, shine upon them, that they may see themselves, and Thy mercy, and the right road, while there is yet time to make a change.

19. Who being past feeling have given themselves over unto lasciviousness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.

O Blessed Jesus, keep us from this ruin ! Indeed I am a Christian, one of Thy members, redeemed, fed, and cherished by Thee ; but I feel myself sometimes tempted to deadly sin. I know that there are sins which harden the heart and lower the whole nature ; if I once become a prey to them, how shall I ever care for religion ? what light from above can rouse me then ? Repeated wilful sins of uncleanness turn the soul itself into flesh, and drive away all desire for a better life.

20. But ye have not so learned Christ ; 21. if so be that ye have heard him, and have been taught by him, as the truth is in Jesus :

Here is a true education for the soul. Jesus Christ is the teacher, and He is the lesson too, and He is in the learner's heart as well. This lesson is taught outwardly in the Church by scriptures, sacraments, holy seasons ; and it is also taught inwardly in the obedient heart by Divine grace. Let me profit in this heavenly learning. My dear Master's life is a study which is more worth my apprehension than all other sciences.

22. That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts ; 23. and be renewed in the spirit of your mind ; 24. and that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness.

There had been a great change in these persons : the old character and life had been laid aside ; they had put on new habits of faith,

of love, of purity ; Jesus Christ was now the clothing of their soul ; His graces and gifts concealed their natural frailty. O Lord, Who hast once made us Thine in Holy Baptism, renew Thy grace in us ; grant us to keep some likeness to Thee. We must either be getting more and more like the heathen, or more and more like our Saviour ; one or the other resemblance will be ours at last.

25. Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour : for we are members one of another.

Christians must be truthful, for we are members of God's family ; our brethren have a right to expect truth from us. We are all one body, and therefore cannot deceive one another without injuring ourselves. Observe how the apostle founds all these rules of conduct which follow upon our incorporation into Christ ; we are His members, His redeemed, we have known His love, therefore we may not lie.

26. Be ye angry, and sin not : let not the sun go down upon your wrath : 27. neither give place to the devil.

Christians must overcome anger. When we allow hatred, revenge, and bitter remembrance of injuries done, to rule in our hearts, we have let in the evil one ; all our prayers will be spoilt, all our good works hindered. It is not always wrong for a Christian to be angry, but he must beware lest his anger get the upper hand of him, and make him do or say what he will be sorry for afterwards. If our natural disposition inclines us to take offence, let us be always on our guard ; let us pray for a patient spirit.

28. Let him that stole steal no more : but rather let him labour, working with his hands the thing which is good, that he may have to give to him that needeth.

Christians must be honest ; their duty is to help others, not injure them ; if they have felt the temptation to pilfer what is not their own, they will be the more desirous to save their needy brethren from it. What a safeguard it is to be doing good ! deeds of kindness, help given to the sick and needy, profit the giver too. O Lord, if my earthly condition has raised me above the temptation to thief, let me be all the more mindful of my poorer friends, whose needs are great.

29. Let no corrupt communication proceed out of your mouth, but that which is good to the use of edifying, that it may minister grace unto the hearers.

Christians must use good words. What power the tongue has for good or for evil ! Lord, if my profane, or silly, or corrupting words have at any time injured another soul, if my words have contradicted my prayers, let me find pardon, and grace to be more

careful. How many things I have said that I now wish were unsaid ! how hard it is to talk for half an hour without saying something that we had better have left in silence !

30. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption.

God set His seal upon me in Baptism and in Confirmation. He has designed me for heaven. My soul and body have been consecrated to His service. Woe to me if I make void all that mercy, if I drive away His indwelling Spirit by my own folly ! A profane word may win man's applause, but it grieves the Holy Spirit. What a poor exchange, to please fools by my talk and to displease my heavenly Friend !

31. Let all bitterness, and wrath, and anger, and clamour, and evil speaking, be put away from you, with all malice :

Christians must be peaceable in all their ways. If we have met with unkindness at the hands of any, let us not repay it with bitter words or harsh treatment, but rather reflect upon God's love which gives us the opportunity of learning patience. If all went smoothly we should be apt to get very selfish ; it is provocations that try what we are made of.

32. And be ye kind one to another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you.

Our own reconciliation with God is the ground of our forgiving others their offences. If we believe that God gave His Son to die for us, that He has blotted out our sins, that we can look forward with humble trust to His mercy in the great day, then we long to imitate that goodness of His. I fear that the unforgiving can never have known what it is to be themselves forgiven. What a blessing, what a delight, to feel God's voice telling us that our sins are forgiven ! It makes all earth's provocations seem light.

CHAPTER V.

2. After general exhortations, to love, 3. to fly fornication, 4. and all uncleanness, 7. not to converse with the wicked, 15. to walk warily, and to be 18. filled with the Spirit, 22. he descendeth to the particular duties, how wives ought to obey their husbands, 25. and husbands ought to love their wives, 32. even as Christ doth his church.

BE ye therefore followers of God, as dear children ;

We cannot imitate God in His infinite power, His unsearchable

wisdom. No, but we can put before us as a pattern His long-suffering, His liberality, His holiness, His great love. Above all, we can study His character as reflected in our Blessed Saviour, in Whom He has become visible to us, so that we might fashion ourselves after that pattern.

2. *And walk in love, as Christ also hath loved us, and hath given himself for us an offering and a sacrifice to God for a sweetsmelling savour.*

The Son of God offered Himself for us freely and readily because we needed such a sacrifice. He gave Himself for His enemies, for those who knew Him not, for those who were unworthy of His great love. He wrought thereby infinite benefits for mankind. May we enter into these dispositions, and give up ourselves cheerfully to serve our brethren in body and soul, doing all we can to make them happy here and hereafter.

3. *But fornication, and all uncleanness, or covetousness, let it not be once named among you, as becometh saints;*

I am consecrated to God by Holy Baptism, by Confirmation, by my receiving Christ's Body and Blood, by many vows, many mercies. I have over and over again professed myself His servant, and received His blessing. Should I allow deadly sin to defile my soul? O Lord, in hours of temptation bring back good thoughts to me, help me to remember that I am Thine; forsake me not, I pray Thee, in the hour of danger.

4. *Neither filthiness, nor foolish talking, nor jesting, which are not convenient: but rather giving of thanks.*

To utter or to enjoy indecent talk, to make profane jokes, to mock at sin, all this may indeed be amusing, but it spoils our prayers. We cannot use our tongue both for the devil and for God's service. Must a Christian then be a dull, silent, austere person, who never has any happiness? No, far from it. He is full of joy at all God's goodness, he is able to love and be loved, his conscience is cleansed, and so he has a light heart. Much truer and more lasting happiness is found thus than the world can give.

5. *For this ye know, that no whoremonger, nor unclean person, nor covetous man, who is an idolater, hath any inheritance in the kingdom of Christ and of God.*

The eternal doors will be shut against such. God will no more be their Father; heaven will be no home for them. O that the eyes of those who live for gain or live for sin were opened! O that they could see how their hearts are becoming vile, and all their

hope of eternal life perishing ! What folly it would be if for filthy pleasure or wretched dross we lost all God's promises.

6. Let no man deceive you with vain words : for because of these things cometh the wrath of God upon the children of disobedience. 7. Be not ye therefore partakers with them.

When you hear it said that God does not care about man's sins, or that everybody is a sinner, vice being a necessity of our condition and not to be helped, when you hear eternal judgment scoffed at, when sinners say they are sure to be forgiven if they pray hard enough on a dying bed, remember all these are but vain words, no substance in them. Death will sweep them all away, and shew us the real truth. Let our lot be with those who believe ; let a holy fear always remain with us.

8. For ye were sometimes darkness, but now are ye light in the Lord : walk as children of light :

Apart from Jesus Christ the soul is in darkness. With Him we can see God and ourselves and the right path. After His grace has shone upon us, how can we love to go back and grope in the darkness again ? O Lord, how can I pass safely through this world's journey without Thy light ? I should soon be lost for ever but for Thee.

9. (For the fruit of the Spirit is in all goodness and righteousness and truth ;)

Christian faith bids us treat our brethren with goodness, endeavouring to please, comfort, and sustain them ; with righteousness, guarding their rights and property ; with truth, letting our words and dealings be sincere. These are the fruits of light. Faith cannot be real unless it brings forth a Christian life and temper. Ah, barren, unprofitable faith of mine ! what can I bring forward to shew I am a believer ?

10. Proving what is acceptable unto the Lord.

A Christian must not expect to find either in Scripture or in the teaching of a spiritual guide a complete directory of what to do and what to forbear. That would be only suitable for children. Our business is to act according to our light, to pray for more light, to do God's Will as best we can, and so find it out more fully. If our object is to serve God, not please ourselves, He will shew us our duty.

11. And have no fellowship with the unfruitful works of darkness, but rather reprove them. 12. For it is a shame even to speak of those things which are done of them in secret.

On which side are you? On the one is all manner of vileness; on the other Christ and His saints. Deeds of darkness on the one side, hosts of light on the other. Those who are Christ's must stand aloof from evil, must reprove it, must warn their brethren against it. We must not stand by idly and let it be supposed that sinful words and acts are indifferent to us. Indeed it is hard for us to blame, so frail and weak as we ourselves are; but we know well what God's judgment on sin is.

13. But all things that are reproved are made manifest by the light: for whatsoever doth make manifest is light.

A sincere good life helps others who come within its reach. They share in its light. We are helped also by leaving our own foolish thoughts, and going out into the daylight and doing our work. Evil dreams fly away before kind words and common duties and hours of prayer.

14. Wherefore he saith, Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light.

Here is a cry. "Sleepers, awake!" Nay, more, it bids the dead to rise. It promises Christ Himself to give Divine light for our path. Lord, Thy grace alone can rouse me from my slumber, bring me forth from the tomb, set me in the right road. I have read in these last seven verses wonderful words about light. Let me not, I beseech Thee, fall back into spiritual darkness again.

15. See then that ye walk circumspectly, not as fools, but as wise, 16. redeeming the time, because the days are evil.

How can I buy up time? It is too precious a commodity to be purchased at any shop for any gold. Yes, but I can get hold of a good deal by watching for every occasion of doing good, by hearty attention in all my times of prayer, by avoiding all sloth, gossip, and dissipation, by seeking God's Will first of all. It is wonderful how much time can be found by one who earnestly searches for it.

17. Wherefore be ye not unwise, but understanding what the will of the Lord is.

We are set here, not to please ourselves, but to do our Master's bidding. The best knowledge is to know God's Will; the highest virtue to do it. What He wills is best. If we do not at once understand this holy Will, we must ask for light to know it, and grace to fulfil it. In the chief actions of our life it should be our business to consider first what God's Will is for us.

18. And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit;

Here are two kinds of mirth, yet how different they are! One is drunken, riotous, quarrelsome, profligate. The end of that mirth is heaviness; but the other proceeds from a heart full of God's love, rejoicing in His goodness. The Holy Spirit gives a happiness such as this world cannot give. There may be hours of darkness for a while, but peace and joy come back again to the soul that clings to God's side. This world's riotous joy soon ends in sorrow. Christ's joy grows, and remains when all around is dark.

19. Speaking to yourselves in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord;

Thus David in his shepherd days sang hymns about God's marvellous works in sky and earth, about His loving care as the Divine Shepherd; thus faithful souls in all time have found hymns fill up spare moments with holy thoughts. Let us praise God both with heart and voice, both in church and at home. Why should we be ashamed of being known as His servants?

20. Giving thanks always for all things unto God and the Father in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ;

I will give thanks always, never complaining of Divine Providence, never neglecting times of worship, keeping in my heart a thankful sense of my Lord's many mercies. And I will give thanks for all things, even for sorrow and for disappointment, for what is hidden from me no less than for what I understand; my heavenly Father, my Divine Saviour, cannot but order all things well for me.

21. Submitting yourselves one to another in the fear of God.

Jesus our Lord set us an example of submission. He rather obeyed than ruled; He shewed respect to the weak, bore with men's infirmities;

"For what is rule, but a sad weight
Of duty, and a snare,
What meanness, but with happier fate
The Saviour's cross to share!"

22. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as unto the Lord.

Here follows an instruction on the duties of the married life, which is the first kind of society that God set up amongst men. The wife owes her husband reverence, obedience, love, after the pattern of that duty which the believing soul owes to Christ. She should honour her husband as representing their common Lord. Even when a husband is very unworthy, yet the wife should cling to this law of duty, and observe it as far as possible.

23. For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ

is the head of the church : and he is the saviour of the body.
24. Therefore as the church is subject unto Christ, so let the wives be to their own husbands in every thing.

Christ is not only Head, but Saviour. We owe Him a single-hearted love and obedience which is expressed by the relations which should exist between a wife and her husband. Alas, how often faults come in and spoil the ideal of love and devotion which the wife owes to her husband on earth, which the soul owes to its Divine Lord above !

25. Husbands, love your wives, even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it ;

The husband owes his wife love, and care, and faithfulness, after the pattern of that devotion which Christ Himself shewed when He chose out humanity and wrought out its redemption. After this Divine example he should love without selfishness, without impatience, without distrust. Ah, Lord, open our hearts to feel the full meaning of this example !

26. That he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word,

Christ died to cleanse our souls through His most precious Blood, which is applied to us in Holy Baptism and other means of grace, which is set forth to us in preaching, which has power to wash away our stains, and make us fit for heaven, unworthy though we are. He would have husband and wife use the marriage union as a preparation for heaven. His Will is their sanctification.

27. That he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot, or wrinkle, or any such thing ; but that it should be holy and without blemish.

The beauty of the soul far exceeds that of the body. Purity and love and cheerfulness are an inward brightness which time cannot take away. But yet this world cannot witness the soul made perfect ; that must be elsewhere. So long as we live here some defects and weaknesses of character remain for our mutual discipline. Glory to God for His promises of a bright hereafter !

28. So ought men to love their wives as their own bodies. He that loveth his wife loveth himself. 29. For no man ever yet hated his own flesh ; but nourisheth and cherisheth it, even as the Lord the church : 30. for we are members of his body, of his flesh, and of his bones.

Christian marriage contains a threefold union, that of body, that of

mutual affection, and, besides these two, the union of faith, both parties belonging to Christ's Church, and preparing for eternity. Closely knit as the married pair should be to each other by every tie of duty and love, yet the heart of each should acknowledge above all loyalty to their common Lord. If their hearts are His, then they will remain each other's whatever storms come.

31. For this cause shall a man leave his father and mother, and shall be joined unto his wife, and they two shall be one flesh.

This was the old law given at the creation (Gen. ii. 24), but Christians see deeper into it than did believers under the old Covenant. They see now in this command a reference to God's Son descending from heaven, espousing our nature, drawing it into perfect union with Himself ; they look forward to the marriage of the Lamb, when His chosen shall have become wholly His.

32. This is a great mystery : but I speak concerning Christ and the church.

Christian marriage cannot be called a sacrament in the strict sense of being a visible sign of invisible grace ordained by Christ Himself for the use of Christians only, but yet it is holy and honourable, and not to be entered upon without prayer. It is a type of the union between Christ and the soul ; it is a means to raise our souls towards heaven, and to multiply the number of God's people. What harm those do to themselves who bring evil desires, worldly motives, sins unrepented of, into such a holy union !

33. Nevertheless let every one of you in particular so love his wife even as himself ; and the wife see that she reverence her husband.

The husband's duties are summed up in love, the wife's in reverence. What household can go on well unless these two dispositions are found there? How merciful is God to have set in His Church so many sweet and precious examples of a Christian family, where the highest Christian graces have been attained ! If He has cast our lot in times of peace, and given us the blessings of home, we must not forget to be thankful.

CHAPTER VI.

1. *The duty of children towards their parents, 5. of servants towards their masters. 10. Our life is a warfare, 12. not only against flesh and blood, but also spiritual enemies. 13. The complete armour of a Christian, 18. and how it ought to be used. 21. Tychicus is commended.*

CHILDREN, *obey your parents in the Lord : for this is right.*

Here follows an instruction on the duties of family life, which is the second kind of human society. Children owe obedience to their parents, both by the law of nature and that of God, Who is their heavenly Father, and after the pattern of Christ Jesus, Who Himself shewed obedience. What can go well with us if we neglect, despise, or affront our parents?

2. *Honour thy father and mother ; which is the first commandment with promise ; 3. that it may be well with thee, and thou mayest live long on the earth.*

The fifth commandment spoke to the Jews of the earthly Canaan, and a long life of happiness there ; but to us it tells of better joys and a more lasting home. If God does not always repay dutiful children with this world's blessings, be sure it is because He has for them something which this world cannot give. What a wide command this is, to honour our parents ! How much duty and gratitude and prayer for them and thought of them is included under it !

4. *And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath : but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord.*

Parents owe their children a Christian education. The children are God's own, lent us for a while, Christ's redeemed, whom He commits to our hands to be trained for Him. Such thoughts forbid spoiling children by letting them have their own way. They forbid also any passionate, selfish, or unkind correction ; they bid us set a good example to these dear little ones who may be so easily led to good or to evil.

5. *Servants, be obedient to them that are your masters according to the flesh, with fear and trembling, in singleness of your heart, as unto Christ ;*

Here follows an instruction on the duties required from members of

a household, which is the third tie that binds men together. The apostle did not disdain to teach and comfort servants. He bade them shew outward respect, feel inward duty, but, above all, look up to that great Master Whose servants they are, and Whose Will it is to employ them for awhile in such and such humble duties. How great is Christ's gospel, which condescends to order all our ways, and bids us do everything as Christians should !

6. Not with eyeservice, as menpleasers ; but as the servants of Christ, doing the will of God from the heart ;

There is a great difference between these two kinds of service. One servant is full of respect and obedience in his master's presence, but allows himself any license of word or act as soon as his back is turned. Another preserves always the same honesty, soberness, truthfulness, knowing that God's eyes are always on him, and that He will call him to account. Lord, print on our hearts this second and true spirit of service, that our whole lives may be Thine.

7. With good will doing service, as to the Lord, and not to men :

In those days servants were mostly slaves, who feared and hated their masters. What a change was wrought by the gospel, which planted love and honesty in the servant's heart, bade him regard his master as a brother having common interests with himself ! Goodwill is the secret of good service. Lord, when our dear lads or girls first go out into the world, make this the spirit of their work, and thus they will get on.

8. Knowing that whatsoever good thing any man doeth, the same shall he receive of the Lord, whether he be bond or free.

God considers the work, not the workman's condition. He will leave no duty without reward, whatever this world may think of it. Slaves could possess no property, have no rights, under Roman law. Ah, but Christ's law taught differently ! That enabled them to treasure up good works, be honourable members of Christ's Body ; it made their souls free, even while their outward condition remained servile.

9. And, ye masters, do the same things unto them, forbearing threatening : knowing that your Master also is in heaven ; neither is there respect of persons with him.

Reflect steadily on this verse, and it will wonderfully alter the aspect of the world. At first sight some are above, some under, some do what they please, others have to obey. The world is full of bitter inequalities, jealousies, and fears ; but if you consider all men alike as servants of a heavenly Master, trusted by Him for a little while with such or such various duties, soon about to be called

to account for their several work, in this view all the world's distinctions fade away, and we are left face to face with God. This verse has immense power both to awe and to comfort us.

10. Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and in the power of his might.

Aster having considered all our duties, what can we do, O Lord Jesus, but fly to Thee, Who art our strength? We feel our own insufficiency, and commend ourselves to Thy Divine power. Thou only canst give us the victory. How different is this from being strong in oneself, in force of limbs or power of mind! That strength is easily overcome by temptation, while God's strength is able to endure.

11. Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to stand against the wiles of the devil.

What is earthly armour against a spiritual foe? What can man's strength or prudence avail against a more than human enemy? His tactics are so clever, his assaults so many, he takes advantage of our very bodies, our recreations, our friends, to deal a deadly blow at us. Nay, do not fear. Think how our Lord and His saints have got the better of this enemy; his wiles are nothing against Divine grace.

12. For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places.

What do these unseen enemies aim at? It is the soul's life. They do not assail the body, but the life of grace. They desire to tear from us God's favour, a pure conscience, a hope of heaven. They reinforce our own natural frailty with evil suggestions. Thank God, we do not need to fear them. They have been cast out of heaven themselves, and would fain drag us down too. But our Lord is Almighty, nothing can tear us from His arms, if we will to be His. O dear Lord, my frailty, and the devil's might, only make me cling closer to Thee!

13. Wherefore take unto you the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand.

The evil day may be near. Some sudden temptation, some adversity comes upon us; we have to die. Though all may seem peaceful now, yet our unseen enemy watches how to do us a mischief. Soldiers who sleep while on duty break the laws of warfare. So do we if we let ourselves be lulled into carelessness.

14. Stand therefore, having your loins girt about with truth, and having on the breastplate of righteousness;

The spiritual armour is put on in six pieces : (1.) The belt comes first, which braced the body and strengthened it for great efforts. This is truth or sincerity. (2.) The breastplate clung close to the chest and protected it. Righteousness or a good conscience is this protection. Remember, it is only from above that the armour can come. Truth and righteousness are gifts from Christ Himself ; only His armoury can supply them.

15. And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace ;

(3.) Boots are put on next. These mean a ready mind to do good. Our feet are guarded against temptation when we are diligent in bringing other souls to Christ, when we help with means and prayers in all good works. Those feet are blessed that run readily to accomplish an errand of love.

16. Above all, taking the shield of faith, wherewith ye shall be able to quench all the fiery darts of the wicked.

(4.) "God has spoken. I believe Him." This is my shield. I trust Him, and this preserves me from excessive distress, or doubt. I turn this shield against all assaults of the enemy, whether he attacks my life or my peace. Help us, Lord, to use this shield skilfully, and always have it ready against temptation.

17. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God :

(5.) A helmet covers the soldier's head. This means here a confidence in Christ's work wrought for us. A good hope of salvation, through our dear Lord's work, guards us from despair, encourages us to fight on. What weapons can hurt me if I have hope of Divine mercy ? (6.) God's Word is a sword ; it pierces consciences, overthrows obstacles, gives the believer a victory. Satan and his armies fear it. Let us so make it our own by meditating on Divine truth that we may ever wield it effectually for attack and defence.

18. Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit, and watching thereunto with all perseverance and supplication for all saints ;

Now the soldier is all ready, but he cannot use his armour without frequent prayer. To pray always means to use all occasions of prayer, employ all possible attention and reverence in it, bear it in mind even when our hands are busy with labour, never do any-

thing which could spoil our prayers, present before God all our friends, all our wants, all our blessings. This great business of prayer, in which we commune with Almighty God, requires more care and earnestness than we commonly bring to it.

19. And for me, that utterance may be given unto me, that I may open my mouth boldly, to make known the mystery of the gospel, 20. for which I am an ambassador in bonds: that therein I may speak boldly, as I ought to speak.

This was the apostle's urgent desire, this he bade his friends make the burden of their prayers for him. Was it that he might be released, might be comforted, be honoured? No; merely that he might be able to declare God's message boldly. To do this was strength and refreshment to him. So long as he could set forth Christ's glory and promises, all else in his condition was indifferent. Courage to speak for His Master was his most cherished object. Let him have this, and he was content.

21. But that ye also may know my affairs, and how I do, Tychicus, a beloved brother and faithful minister in the Lord, shall make known to you all things: 22. whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that ye might know our affairs, and that he might comfort your hearts.

They would pray more earnestly, they would endure more bravely, they would be strengthened in faith, when they heard of the apostle's dangers and successes. His time of freedom had won many hearts, but he did yet more in his captivity. His infirmities wrought for God more than his talents had done. Oh that this lesson of triumph through endurance might be ours when we have to suffer!

23. Peace be to the brethren, and love with faith, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ. 24. Grace be with all them that love our Lord Jesus Christ in sincerity. Amen.

The love mentioned in these verses is faithful and incorruptible. Such a love shares in the blessing of peace and grace. Christian love is bound up with the great facts of redemption through Christ, and with the Divine Personality and holiness of the Redeemer. It lasts on while this world's affections change and decay. May our reflections on this glorious Epistle root such a love more firmly in our hearts. Consider Who our Redeemer is, and what He has done for us.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE PHILIPPIANS.

CHAPTER I.

3. He testifieth his thankfulness to God, and his love toward them, for the fruits of their faith, and fellowship in his sufferings, 9. daily praying to him for their increase in grace: 12. he sheweth what good the faith of Christ had received by his troubles at Rome, 21. and how ready he is to glorify Christ either by his life or death, 27. exhorting them to unity, 28. and to fortitude in persecution.

PAUL and Timotheus, the servants of Jesus Christ, to all the saints in Christ Jesus which are at Philippi, with the bishops and deacons:

Here are servants of Jesus Christ at a time when it cost something to serve Him. His mercy has made it easier for us to be His servants now. Let us rejoice as faithful servants to do His business, and obey His orders. Here, too, Christians are called saints, when to be a Christian was a real protest for holiness against an idolatrous world. We, too, are bound by our calling to be saints, to hate all uncleanness, to be reverent and devout. The world thinks scorn of saints, but we will not be afraid of the world's mockery. Our fathers had to bear worse than that.

2. *Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ.*

Grace on earth that we may have peace in heaven; or rather grace and peace, both beginning now that they may end in the perfect holiness and happiness of heaven. God gives these gifts. Christ brought them down to earth for us, and bestows them by the Spirit on His people's hearts. They mean the best happiness that we can possess now and hope for afterwards, and more than those who enjoy them can express in words.

3. *I thank my God upon every remembrance of you, 4.*

always in every prayer of mine for you all making request with joy, 5. for your fellowship in the gospel from the first day until now;

This delighted the apostle most of all, to find liberal hearts. He prayed for them, he knew they wanted many graces yet, he gave them much counsel and warning in this very Epistle, but yet he rejoices when he thought of their charity towards the preachers of the gospel, and zeal to keep forward its progress. Fellowship here seems to mean liberality or bounty. Let us learn hence how even in our own homes we may share in the good works of the saints, in the preaching of the gospel, rescuing the fallen, teaching the young, going out to distant lands for Christ's sake. We can share by our alms and prayers and hearty sympathy in the work of Christ's servants everywhere, and so find fellowship with them.

6. Being confident of this very thing, that he which hath begun a good work in you will perform it until the day of Jesus Christ:

O Lord, I see too plainly that any good work which is done by me was begun by Thy grace only, and must depend on Thee for continuance. Of myself comes nothing except folly, but Christ's Blood sprinkled upon my barren heart may yet bring forth some good thing pleasing to God, as being the work of His Son. I do not want praise and recognition from men, the day of Christ is soon enough to declare what each has done.

7. Even as it is meet for me to think this of you all, because I have you in my heart; inasmuch as both in my bonds, and in the defence and confirmation of the gospel, ye all are partakers of my grace.

What made him ready to answer for his friends' perseverance in grace? Because he loved them and prayed for them, and because they had shown such good offices towards him, succouring him in prison, standing by him in trouble, rendering him all the help they could; these were substantial proofs of their devotion. God grant that we, as believers, may shew not mere words or feelings, but acts of charity as signs that we belong to His people.

8. For God is my record, how greatly I long after you all in the bowels of Jesus Christ.

My own love for God or man is cold and shallow, and soon polluted, but I fly to the sacred Heart of Christ Jesus, in which is an infinite treasure of pure and holy love. There I find devout love that I can offer to God, pure affection that I can shew to my neighbour. My own coldness is kindled by the flame of Christ's

Heart. Lord, teach me to sanctify all my earthly affections by cherishing them in Thee and for Thee.

9. *And this I pray, that your love may abound yet more and more in knowledge and in all judgment;*

Love and knowledge do well together. One without the other is harmful. God keep us from warm feelings without judgment, and still more from a clear understanding without love. There is no limit to our growth in these two graces. Nay, this life at the longest has only room for their first planting. They will come to ripeness in a better soil and happier climate than here.

10. *That ye may approve things that are excellent; that ye may be sincere and without offence till the day of Christ;*

What else can we wish for those we love? May they have a discerning mind to choose the good and refuse the evil. May they walk through this world's ways with a pure and single heart, avoiding the snares of the enemy, and persevering till the end comes. This is a better wish for them than treasures of gold or a great name, or the applause of all men.

11. *Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.*

These fruits we can only bear by being grafted by faith on a better stem than our own. If we consider what noble fruits of courage and purity and charity some lives have borne by God's grace, we shall be discontented with our own poor productions, and long to do something more than we have yet done for God's glory and our brethren's good.

12. *But I would ye should understand, brethren, that the things which happened unto me have fallen out rather unto the furtherance of the gospel; 13. so that my bonds in Christ are manifest in all the palace, and in all other places; 14. and many of the brethren in the Lord, waxing confident by my bonds, are much more bold to speak the word without fear.*

God's providence so ordered it that St. Paul's imprisonment and the danger he was in brought many to hear of him and inquire why he suffered. Every day brought inquirers and fresh disciples, and other Christians were encouraged by this to preach Christ. Let us admire God's providence, and remember that all things fulfil His bidding. Imprisonment or freedom, sickness or health, life or death, work out His gracious Will. We should be bold, whatever happens, to stand up for God's side and believe in His final victory. How great is that love which never forsakes us, even when all seems darkest!

15. Some indeed preach Christ even of envy and strife; and some also of good will: 16. the one preach Christ of contention, not sincerely, supposing to add affliction to my bonds: 17. but the other of love, knowing that I am set for the defence of the gospel.

Some, then, profess religious zeal out of envy and strife. Some bring to holy things contention, insincerity, unkindness. So it is that God's most precious treasures are misused by man's folly. I will not marvel when I see such kind of profession as this, since S. Paul had to see it. But I will choose for my own part that religious spirit which abounds in goodwill, is sincere, loving, and faithful. That is true preaching which preaches in life and acts as well as words. How can Christ be effectually preached by those who do not strive to shew Him forth in their doings?

18. What then? notwithstanding, every way, whether in pretence, or in truth, Christ is preached; and I therein do rejoice, yea, and will rejoice.

Christ was preached both by those who were full of love for His holy Name and His imprisoned apostle, and by those too who merely sought to gain a following for themselves and counteract S. Paul's influence. But he was confident in the good cause, and knew that if His Divine Master was proclaimed, true hearts would be won to Him, while false guides and their teaching would soon pass away. The gospel will win. Let Christ Jesus be known, and He will be loved. Such should be our confidence too.

19. For I know that this shall turn to my salvation through your prayer, and the supply of the Spirit of Jesus Christ,

These vexations are but the road, rough perhaps and dark, but still leading upward. When we have reached the golden gate we shall forget the troubles of the way. S. Paul felt that his friends' prayers, and God's Spirit bestowed in answer to them, helped him in bearing up. His courage was not pride, but a humble trust in Divine mercy which had never failed him yet.

20. According to my earnest expectation and my hope, that in nothing I shall be ashamed, but that with all boldness, as always, so now also Christ shall be magnified in my body, whether it be by life, or by death.

Shame and glory are different in the world's account and in the eyes of a Christian. Yet what courage is truer than this which stands out against the world, and what honour greater than Christ's martyrs have won? Dear Lord! take away my eyes from that glory which has only titles, uniforms, human applause, and rewards of

earth to shew, and fix them upon that standard of true faith and love which Thou hast shewn us in Thy saints.

21. For to me to live is Christ, and to die is gain.

This was the gospel as its first preachers understood it, true union with a living Lord, to Whom life and heart and work belonged, and yet this was not to be fully attained till earth was over. It is no mere creed, but true affection towards a Divine Master. They served Him with great delight and zeal while they lived on earth, and looked forward to see His face in heaven.

22. But if I live in the flesh, this is the fruit of my labour : yet what I shall choose I wot not.

How strange a hesitation ! Which is best, death or life ? Death seemed the best, because of seeing Christ the Lord in glory, and leaving this world's temptations and sorrows far behind. But yet death put an end to S. Paul's work. He could then win no more souls. Life seemed to him worth living just for this. Ah, how earthly and poor are my hopes of life, or fears of death, compared to these !

23. For I am in a strait betwixt two, having a desire to depart, and to be with Christ ; which is far better : 24. nevertheless to abide in the flesh is more needful for you.

Who can tell what great things are meant by departing and being with Christ ? It means being rid of all evil, and enjoying all peace, and looking forward to a glorious fulfilment. The happy dead are at rest, but they are with their Master more closely than they could be on earth, and they still pray for us. Nor do we forget them. Yet this world at its worst is worth stopping in if we can do any good here. To help the weak, teach the ignorant, convert the fallen, is well worth the postponement of heaven. We shall not lose by it in the end.

25. And having this confidence, I know that I shall abide and continue with you all for your furtherance and joy of faith ; 26. that your rejoicing may be more abundant in Jesus Christ for me by my coming to you again.

" If he were wanted for his Lord,
S. Martin prayed to stay."

And this was after S. Paul's own decision. He thought of his friends' joy at seeing him, and learning the truth from his lips, and he would sooner procure them this profit and put off his own triumph for a while. What a deal there is about joy in this short Epistle ! A true Christian is not gloomy ; he rejoices in God's truth, and in the love of friends, and all the mercies that abound here, while yet he looks forward to better joy to come.

27. Only let your conversation be as it becometh the gospel of Christ : that whether I come and see you, or else be absent, I may hear of your affairs, that ye stand fast in one spirit, with one mind striving together for the faith of the gospel ;

“Thy servants militant below
Have each, O Lord, their post.”

What matters it in the end what our condition was, so long as we have fought on Christ's side? Yet this requires courage, and union with other true hearts, and help from above. Faith is so precious a treasure that the devil and his followers try to rob us of it; our part is to fight and pray.

28. And in nothing terrified by your adversaries : which is to them an evident token of perdition, but to you of salvation, and that of God.

How can weak, trembling hearts gain this courage? All around seems dark, the enemy is strong, and we are alone. Nay, the Lord is our Rock; they that are with us are more than they that are with them. It is not that fear and sorrow do not trouble our calmness for a while, as they did the soul of the holy Jesus Himself, but yet we look up to God and await our release at His hands. He is the true Disposer of events, whatever they be.

29. For unto you it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake;

Two precious gifts, both from above, true faith and true endurance for faith's sake. It is a great privilege to believe in God's Word, to pray to Him, to come to His altar—indeed an inestimable treasure; but God has another honour in store for His friends which is still more precious, that of being laughed at, reviled, ill-used, for serving Him. Let us, when we enjoy the treasure of faith, encourage ourselves to embrace that of suffering if it should come to us.

30. Having the same conflict which ye saw in me, and now hear to be in me.

Ah! S. Paul had begun his work at Philippi by suffering (Acts xvi. 19), and he was continuing it at Rome in like manner; this was the secret of its power. He did not bid his friends follow him in working miracles, or seeing revelations, but he bade them welcome to the contempt and hatred and ill-usage which was his frequent lot; here they might all share his crown.

CHAPTER II.

1. He exhorteth them to unity, and to all humbleness of mind, by the example of Christ's humility and exaltation : 12. to a careful proceeding in the way of salvation, that they be as lights to the wicked world, 16. and comforts to him their apostle, who is now ready to be offered up to God. 19. He hopeth to send Timothy to them, whom he greatly commendeth, 25. as Epaphroditus also, whom he presently sendeth to them.

IF there be therefore any consolation in Christ, if any comfort of love, if any fellowship of the Spirit, if any bowels and mercies, 2. fulfil ye my joy, that ye be likeminded, having the same love, being of one accord, of one mind.

If all our deepest joys and truest comforts and highest yearnings are real, if they mean anything, then let us give up something for their sake ; for example, let our selfishness and pride give way. What ! shall God come so near to us, speak so sweetly to us, shew us such bright hopes, and we be at the mercy of our own petty vanity ? In the presence of the gospel, and what it does for us and bids us do, the apostle points out the exceeding folly and littleness of the jealousies which keep Christians asunder. Every household and every congregation of believers should strive for the blessedness of peace ; sometimes it is beyond our reach, do what we may, but let it not be our own fault if we miss it.

3. *Let nothing be done through strife or vainglory ; but in lowliness of mind let each esteem other better than themselves.*

Look on yourself as what you are by nature, weak and worthless, and, still further, as having misused God's good gifts and broken His laws—this is too true ; and, yet more, as being much puffed up by vanity and desirous to shew off for better than you are ; and then remember how much less opportunities others have had, how much more diligent, more simple, more unselfish than yourself are many of the characters among whom you move. Such thoughts are wholesome and true.

4. *Look not every man on his own things, but every man also on the things of others.*

The fountain of discord is selfishness ; learn to enter into your brethren's hearts by sympathy ; learn to look at things as they do, and feel their loneliness or pain, and what offends or grieves them ; thus you and they will be at one, and find infinite comfort and joy in this fellow-feeling.

5. Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus :

This is the pattern set forth by God for us to follow ; it is not the outward acts of Christ's life, but His holy and humble character, that is displayed for our imitation in the Gospels. Here is our true Example, Who teaches us by His life to give up, and bear, and love. No wise man of this earth could teach us such lessons as these.

6. Who, being in the form of God, thought it not robbery to be equal with God :

Divine glory was His own, yet He laid it aside. He had by nature a glory and majesty which our weak minds fail to comprehend, heaven for His dwelling, adoring angels for His ministers ; yet He put it all aside and chose to undergo a mortal condition on our poor earth.

7. But made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men :

“ Think on the eternal home
The Saviour left for you,
Think on the Lord most holy, come
To dwell with hearts untrue.”

This is the first step in our Redeemer's humiliation. He emptied Himself of His Divine glory and became a sharer in our earthly life, nay, in its rough work, and poverty, and sorrows.

8. And being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross.

Here is the second step. He not only appeared as man, but humbled Himself still further, and became subject to death. He wished to know by experience all our life and our end also, so He determined to encounter death. And, yet one more step downward, He chose the worst kind of death, the most shameful, most painful, most lingering of all. What do we not owe the Son of God for all this great love ? He spared Himself nothing, if only He might win our hearts. He knew this way of the Cross was the true way to glory.

9. Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name :

This is He Who was reviled and crucified, now He is exalted to heaven, and is worshipped there. What a prospect this opens for His followers ! they may meet with contempt now, as their Master did, but one day they will be over-abundantly repaid for

all their sufferings. Let my work be, while I live, to exalt and magnify Jesus Christ, not bring shame on Him by my wilful sin.

10. *That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth; 11. and that every tongue should confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.*

We should, indeed, be sticks and stones if we did not join in this universal praise and prayer. We are not ashamed to own Christ for our Lord, we will pray to Him and praise Him, bow at His blessed Name, worship at His holy altar. Our hearts are indeed cold and our devotion poor, yet we will give what we can. We confess that the Son of Mary Who died on the Cross of shame for us is our Lord now, and will one day be our Judge. His life is our pattern, and His words our guiding-star through this dark world.

12. *Wherefore, my beloved, as ye have always obeyed, not as in my presence only, but now much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling.*

This is one side of truth ; work out your own salvation, do all the good you can, keep from any kind of evil, remember your enemy is watching to mislead you, and resist him with all your strength. Now is the time for you to win eternal life. God has put your happiness or misery in your own hands, it is for you to choose happiness and strive for it. Let such words encourage Christ's soldiers to do their best.

13. *For it is God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure.*

Here is the other side of truth ; all is of God. He alone gives us good desires, and strength to act on them. He breathes faith into our hearts, and revives it when it burns low. His mercy has provided ransom for the sinful, grace for the helpless, heaven for the undeserving. Our eternal lot is hidden in His sovereign Will. This verse is as true as verse 12. I take them both together and try to live by their joint guidance. In heaven I shall understand how there was room both for my efforts and God's Almightiness.

14. *Do all things without murmurings and disputings :*

The Church is God's household, and all we His servants, with our various places and occupations. How intolerable a servant would he be who was always finding fault with orders, complaining of his duties, upsetting the order of the house ! If I am but placed low down, let me thank my great Master that my responsibility is less,

let me cheerfully do or suffer what His gracious providence appoints.

15. That ye may be blameless and harmless, the sons of God, without rebuke, in the midst of a crooked and perverse nation, among whom ye shine as lights in the world;

Stars in the dark night of the world, such should Christ's followers be. The stars never lose their way, or break their order; clouds may hide them from our eyes, but when the cloud has passed the star is there ready to guide us. What an image of stedfastness, purity, guiding wisdom, is held out to me here, but, alas! my life and character are a very dim reflection of this bright picture.

16. Holding forth the word of life; that I may rejoice in the day of Christ, that I have not run in vain, neither laboured in vain.

Paul had by his words and prayers kindled these bright stars; at the last day he would find many souls brought to God by his means. I, on the contrary, looking back, find in my conduct towards others much caprice, much selfishness, much temper, much sloth, but very few souls brought to God by me. Whom have I taught to love God, to reverence His Word or His Sacraments? Alas! my influence over them seems now to have been all in vain, and spent like mere wind.

17. Yea, and if I be offered upon the sacrifice and service of your faith, I joy, and rejoice with you all. 18. For the same cause also do ye joy, and rejoice with me.

Thus the Church has pronounced the martyrs happy, has observed as festivals the day on which they suffered, has praised God for their triumph. They offered the noblest sacrifice of all, their own life. Faith, and prayers, and souls won, and churches raised, and psalms of praise sung, all these were sacrifices with which God was well pleased. But those who died for His Name followed closest on Christ's own example.

19. But I trust in the Lord Jesus to send Timotheus shortly unto you, that I also may be of good comfort, when I know your state. 20. For I have no man likeminded, who will naturally care for your state.

Lord, grant us ministers and patterns of Christian life after this example. Men naturally care for wealth, or pleasure, or honour, but when the true light has shone on the heart, then it becomes natural to love those for whom Christ died, and spend time and

substance on their welfare. This is a new and better nature than that which we derive from Adam. Lord, make it to grow in us and bring forth good works.

21. *For all seek their own, not the things which are Jesus Christ's.*

If selfishness crept in even among the apostles' friends, where shall we be free from it? Remember, it does not change the heart to be called a priest, or be engaged in preaching God's Word. The world and the devil are not kept out so easily as that. Good example, religious privileges, Scripture knowledge, may yet leave us unfaithful. Christ's concerns require diligent stewards, but He is a right good Master to those who serve Him heartily.

22. *But ye know the proof of him, that, as a son with the father, he hath served with me in the gospel.* 23. *Him therefore I hope to send presently, so soon as I shall see how it will go with me.*

How ready S. Paul was to commend true service! He was far from that envy which depreciates others' merits, or forgets to mention their share of a good deed. God give us generous hearts to recognise those who serve Him, and give them their due honour. It would be mean and selfish to try to keep all love for oneself, instead of rejoicing to shed it abroad on all those who need it.

24. *But I trust in the Lord that I also myself shall come shortly.*

Apparently this expectation was not fulfilled, and the apostle had yet a long time to wait in prison. How hard he must have felt it when he longed to be preaching Christ among the heathen! His patience, and yet hopefulness together, give us a lesson for hours of sickness, or when our plans break down; we should trust God to put things right shortly, and yet not be confounded if He does not do so. His time is best.

25. *Yet I supposed it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, and companion in labour, and fellowsoldier, but your messenger, and he that ministered to my wants.*

How many titles of honour this good man enjoyed! and yet it is in the power of each of us to shew brotherly love, share in trouble, join in the fight against evil, open our hearts and resources to help our brethren. Whatever we do for the humblest Christian is done to the apostle's Lord and Master, Who welcomes and rewards those who succour Him, though unseen.

26. *For he longed after you all, and was full of heaviness, because that ye had heard that he had been sick.* 27. *For indeed he was sick nigh unto death: but God had mercy on him; and not on him only, but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow.* 28. *I sent him therefore the more carefully, that, when ye see him again, ye may rejoice, and that I may be the less sorrowful.*

It is a mercy, and good reason for rejoicing, when God gives us back a dear friend from the edge of the grave. It is a mercy, too, and a mingled season of grief and joy, when God takes our friend to Himself. "What!" says the unbeliever, "you cannot be glad both ways." Yes, we are, for we trust that our Father's love and care orders all things well for His Holy Church and the good of those who love Him. Even if sorrow comes first, joy will follow in good time.

29. *Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness; and hold such in reputation:* 30. *because for the work of Christ he was nigh unto death, not regarding his life, to supply your lack of service toward me.*

If we regard our own comfort and ease and credit very highly, are we likely ever to follow in the steps of these brave followers of Christ who reckoned their very life of no account? There have been, and are still, noble souls who have put the service of Christ, and of His sick and poor members, first of all, and joyfully laid down their own health and life in such a cause. These are brave soldiers who have lifted up the standard of the Cross for us to follow.

CHAPTER III.

1. He warneth them to beware of the false teachers of the circumcision, 4. shewing that himself hath greater cause than they to trust in the righteousness of the law: 7. which notwithstanding he counteth as dung and loss, to gain Christ and his righteousness, 12. therein acknowledging his own imperfection. 15. He exhorteth them to be thus minded, 17. and to imitate him, 18. and to decline the ways of carnal Christians.

FINALLY, my brethren, rejoice in the Lord. To write the same things to you, to me indeed is not grievous, but for you it is safe.

We are not only allowed but bidden to rejoice, and this over and

over again in Holy Scripture. The command to rejoice bids us fight against a sullen, moody temper, bids us remember how many blessings we have, reminds us of all God's mercies to us in Christ, and His great promises for the world to come. A sunny, cheerful view of things helps us through many difficulties, and adds largely to the happiness of those with whom we live. It is always right to thank God and to intrust ourselves peacefully in His hands.

2. Beware of dogs, beware of evil workers, beware of the concision.

Dogs mean profane scoffers who use holy words in mockery. Evil workers are those who stir up bitterness while professing to do work for God. The concision is S. Paul's name of reproach for those who set great store on the outward sign of Jewish profession, and cared for nothing beyond. The whole verse bids us follow only that religious spirit which is reverent, gentle, and sincere. No other religious activity is acceptable to God.

3. For we are the circumcision, which worship God in the spirit, and rejoice in Christ Jesus, and have no confidence in the flesh.

Let such a service be mine. I will worship in spirit, not only with outward reverence, trusting not in any goodness of my own, but in my Redeemer's mercy, putting aside and stripping off in God's sight all that this world may have given me of wealth or honour. True Jews and true Christians have the same religion, only those means of approach to God which the former sought for, the latter have had bestowed on them, and therefore have more reason to rejoice in God's goodness.

4. Though I might also have confidence in the flesh. If any other man thinketh that he hath whereof he might trust in the flesh, I more : 5. circumcised the eighth day, of the stock of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, an Hebrew of the Hebrews ; as touching the law, a Pharisee ; 6. concerning zeal, persecuting the church ; touching the righteousness which is in the law, blameless.

All these were high honours in Jewish estimation, and gave Paul a great place in his countrymen's esteem. He might well have been proud of his position, character, and conduct, but he had now found something much surer to trust to. Lord, teach me to feel my own unworthiness. If I can gain this great gift of seeing myself as I truly am, my frailty, my ignorance, my folly, in contrast with Thy great goodness, then I shall no more be proud of my wretchedness. Let the outward accidents of money, or strength,

or courage, or cleverness, appear to me the poor things that they really are.

7. But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ.

Give me such eyes as these ; let me discern which is lead and which are diamonds. All greatness here is loss if it keeps me from serving Christ. There are many who have found all kinds of prosperity and splendour in this world, but have lost, in gaining this, something which worlds could not make up.

8. Yea doubtless, and I count all things but loss for the excellency of the knowledge of Christ Jesus my Lord : for whom I have suffered the loss of all things, and do count them but dung, that I may win Christ,

What should I say if Christ put before me the loss of all things ? for the good opinion of men to be reviled and despised, for comfort to be in rags, for ease to suffer pain, for the society of friends to be lonely or in prison ? Could I willingly part with all this if He bade me, and find in His goodness my all-sufficient stay ? I scarcely dare to answer this for myself, but I am sure that my Lord has over-abundantly repaid His friends for all their losses.

9. And be found in him, not having mine own righteousness, which is of the law, but that which is through the faith of Christ, the righteousness which is of God by faith :

Human righteousness is founded on man's own strength, and produces only natural virtues, but God gives a Divine righteousness which rests on Christ, and brings forth a love and patience and hope which are beyond nature. He would have us righteous, not in our own sight or before men, but in and by the perfect holiness of our dear Lord, which is reckoned to us, if we are His.

10. That I may know him, and the power of his resurrection, and the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death ;

This is the way of the Cross, by which Christ our Lord went Himself. It is almost beyond the comprehension of our too easy comfortable Christianity ; it meant the giving up all things for the sake of love, and so feeling the power of Christ's Cross, and His Presence near, and His glory close in front. Perhaps it may be God's Will to send us some sharp pain to make us enter this Divine fellowship of suffering. Let us at least give up our own selfishness, and take little crosses patiently.

11. If by any means I might attain unto the resurrection of the dead.

A life all purity and peace, whence sin and death are banished, where God is seen clearly, and all the deep mysteries resolved that weigh on us here. Is not this worth striving for?

"O day, for which creation and all its tribes were made.
O joy, for all the former woes a thousandsfold repaid."

12. Not as though I had already attained, either were already perfect: but I follow after, if that I may apprehend that for which also I am apprehended of Christ Jesus.

Not even S. Paul had gained full knowledge, perfect communion, unclouded joy. He was fighting and suffering, as we have to fight and suffer; but he felt that he was not alone, for One full of love and power had laid hold of his hand. We, too, in our dark moments may feel that Hand stretched out to help us. How can we persevere except by our Redeemer's mercy?

13. Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, 14. I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.

Courage, dear friend, look forward. After a few short years, what will this life be to us? Do not think how much pain, how many insults, how many sad days and lonely nights lie behind you, but dwell upon the great promises of God to you in Christ, which will soon be fulfilled. The golden gates lie only a little way in front; do not let any deceit of the enemy trip you up now and spoil all.

15. Let us therefore, as many as be perfect, be thus minded: and if in anything ye be otherwise minded, God shall reveal even this unto you.

Let us make S. Paul's rule ours, to forget the past, and press onward towards heaven. If we have the conviction of our own imperfection deeply rooted in our minds, we shall be always ready to learn from God and from good men. Only pride is deaf, and thinks itself beyond reach of improvement. God will not leave in darkness any soul who seeks Him earnestly.

16. Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing.

There is one way leading to one end—one Divine pattern, one holy catholic faith, one Bible, one altar. Lord, let us all with

one heart and one soul follow Thy saints along the narrow way, that so at last we may come to the one joyful end that they have found. This is the old way wherein the Church has walked from the beginning, and it should be our path still, whether it be in darkness or light.

17. Brethren, be followers together of me, and mark them which walk so as ye have us for an ensample.

This verse is addressed to us also. We are bidden to follow in the apostle's steps. If we believe, pray, endure, hope, as he did, our religion will be life-giving. Lord, even in our lukewarm days Thy grace is able to raise us up examples of the apostle's spirit. It is not out of fashion yet ; it can still kindle hearts and change a world. Let our present reflections on S. Paul's letters lead us to live more as he did.

18. (For many walk, of whom I have told you often, and now tell you even weeping, that they are the enemies of the cross of Christ :

If Christ's Cross had enemies in the apostolic Church, what shall we say now ? How many enemies must it have among professing Christians in these careless days ? And yet what a downfall to have Christ's Cross for an enemy. Unless the Cross is our friend and on our side, and we beside it, we cannot resist Satan's hosts. I hope never to be ashamed of the Cross, and then my crucified Saviour will not be ashamed of me when He returns in glory.

19. Whose end is destruction, whose God is their belly, and whose glory is in their shame, who mind earthly things.)

This is enmity to the Cross, love of the world and pleasure. Lord, keep me from such a life and such a death ; let my hope be heaven, my God the all-pure and perfect One, my glory to be modest, and upright, and true, my mind set on charity and peace. Thus all my life long the Cross of Christ will go with me and be my friend, and at last, when I enter the dark valley, will be a rod and staff to strengthen me.

20. For our conversation is in heaven ; from whence also we look for the Saviour, the Lord Jesus Christ :

Unless we love to read of our country, to hear news from it, to learn of its triumphs, sing its hymns, fight its battles, maintain its enterprises, how do we hope to settle in it for ever ? Our best Friend has started from this land of exile, and gone into our own country to settle there and make a home ready for us. Often we

wish He would come and take us thither. It is far more beautiful and wonderful than all that this world can show.

21. Who shall change our vile body, that it may be fashioned like unto his glorious body, according to the working whereby he is able even to subdue all things unto himself.

Our body is not vile in itself, but precious, as made by God and redeemed by Christ. Yet it is exposed to many ills, and subject to pain and corruption. It is made of dust, and turns to dust again. How can we comprehend that new glorified body which Christ promises us, which will be free from pain and death, which will be the temple of a renewed and purified soul, and that for ever? It is only Christ's rising from the dead that makes it possible for us to believe this. What came to Him may come to us.

CHAPTER IV.

1. From particular admonitions 4. he proceedeth to general exhortations, 10. shewing how he rejoiced at their liberality towards him lying in prison, not so much for the supply of his own wants, as for the grace of God in them. 19. And so he concludeth with prayer and salutations.

THEREFORE, my brethren dearly beloved and longed for, my joy and crown, so stand fast in the Lord, my dearly beloved.

Our friends, our pupils, our children, will one day be to us either cause for rejoicing or for mourning, either a crown of glory or a load of shame. If we and they have stood fast for a while we shall meet again in everlasting happiness, and wonder how soon this world's troubles have passed away.

2. I beseech Euodias, and beseech Syntyche, that they be of the same mind in the Lord.

If two Christian women, friends and converts of the apostle, in that first age of the Church's love, had fallen out and needed to be set at one again, how likely it is that strife will find a way amongst ourselves! The apostle pleaded earnestly for peace; he bade them put aside all that had come between them. How happy shall we be when we are of the same mind with our friends, when prejudice, quarrels, and party strife are all forgotten!

3. And I entreat thee also, true yokefellow, help those women

which laboured with me in the gospel, with Clement also, and with other my fellowlabourers, whose names are in the book of life.

God writes in His Book of Life all those who labour to do good. Grant, Lord, we pray Thee, that our names may be so written there by Thy mercy, that no sin of ours may ever blot them out. Men may forget good deeds, but they are all safely treasured up by Divine mercy, and will one day be made known.

4. Rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, Rejoice.

The foundation of this joy is the hope of God's mercy. It gives frail mortals strength to bear up against despair, and to resist temptation. This joy must never quite leave us, not even when we suffer, or lose our dear ones, or draw near to our end. Not even the excuse of our own weakness can quite extinguish it, for it rests on God's eternal promises.

5. Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand.

The Lord listens to my words, reads my thoughts, knows all my life. Is it fit for me in such a Presence to give way to violent anger or evil passions? Shall I suffer myself to outrage the All-seeing Eye by deadly sin? Lord, keep this wholesome thought, that Thou art near, ever in my mind, so that it may be my safeguard in temptation. Let me behave so peacefully, kindly, and truly to all men that they may see Christ is my Master.

6. Be careful for nothing; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.

Plans and desires are sure to be right if we can consult God over them. We could not approach His Throne with any covetous or malicious request. Let our minds be full only of what we are able to thank God for, to ask Him for, to work for, trusting in His help. Then we shall cast our care on Him, and be at peace within. Prayer may be short if our time is limited, and yet long enough for much pleading with our heavenly Father.

7. And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus.

Here is a valiant sentinel to guard our hearts. How can sin or unbelief find an entry where God's peace is in possession? Take courage, dear friend, you are not alone among enemies. God and His hosts watch over you. God will not let you be ensnared.

or beaten down. Your prayers daily bring down a supply of heavenly comfort.

8. *Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things.*

Look round on purpose to notice what is good, and copy it in your own life. You may see many examples of patience, many kind, unselfish, loving souls, many who endure bravely, who pray devoutly, who keep honest and pure amidst far greater temptations than yours are. Stories of brave acts done in these days, tales of good men long ago, all have lessons to humble and yet encourage you. Keep away from your heart vile and foolish thoughts, and fill it with images and desires that may lift you up towards higher things.

9. *Those things, which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you.*

The saints guide us along the way towards the same blessed home where they have long since entered. Their teaching, their life, their death, have been fruitful for good. This world's conquerors pass away and leave only an empty name, but good Christians live on in the grace and faith of those who have found salvation by their means.

10. *But I rejoiced in the Lord greatly, that now at the last your care of me hath flourished again; wherein ye were also careful, but ye lacked opportunity.*

Let us, like these Philippians, never let our charity drop. If God has given any good work into our hands, as they had the honour of providing for the great apostle in his captivity, let us carry it on till the end. The needs of any one soul, help to some mission or good work, laying aside regularly according to our means for some one good purpose, these objects are all worth our care. Too often we take up one good work, and then neglect it for another, instead of persevering.

11. *Not that I speak in respect of want: for I have learned, in whatsoever state I am, therewith to be content. 12. I know both how to be abased, and I know how to abound: every where and in all things I am instructed both to be full and to be hungry, both to abound and to suffer need.*

Teach me, Lord, this wholesome lesson ; let me learn to be contented and at peace, whether I am poor or rich. The lessons of poverty are hard to learn, and yet those of riches perhaps harder still. If I am poor, I would envy no one ; I would be diligent, thankful, and glad to help others. If God makes me wealthy I must take care my wealth does not harden my heart, or make me self-indulgent. So long as I learn Christ's way, and obtain everlasting life, it does not matter very much whether I have been poor or rich here.

13. I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me.

If we trust in our own strength we soon find by sad experience how little that is, but very weak persons who trusted in Christ only have found His almighty Hand stretched out to be their support. It is a great comfort in our extreme weakness to feel that our dear Lord is so near. What an infinite loss is theirs who have to bear trouble without having faith in their Redeemer !

14. Notwithstanding ye have well done, that ye did communicate with my affliction.

Why does God permit His poor members to suffer affliction ? For this reason at least, that our love and pity may be called forth to help them. I wonder perhaps why it has pleased God to let some one whom I know be so ill, so poor, so blind, so weak, but it is a plain answer to say that it was in order I might lend this person some help or comfort. And I am sure that my attention to the afflicted will be a blessing to myself also.

15. Now ye Philippians know also, that in the beginning of the gospel, when I departed from Macedonia, no church communicated with me as concerning giving and receiving, but ye only. 16. For even in Thessalonica ye sent once and again unto my necessity.

Think again of those first days when the gospel began with ourselves, when we first felt our sins, and God's mercy, and the need of true conversion. O happy days, what deep confession, what earnest self-denials, what joyful communions at God's altar ! Who will bring us back something of that old love and zeal. Since then we have learnt much experience, but perhaps our hearts are grown somewhat cold and hard.

17. Not because I desire a gift : but I desire fruit that may abound to your account.

Ah ! in our account with God how large is the list of blessings

received, how small the account of gifts and thanks repaid to the All-merciful? I fear God will find our accounts do not balance. May He stir up in us liberal hearts to spend and be spent for Him while life lasts, and may He also supply our great deficiency from the rich treasure of Christ's merits. Bear in mind this, that charity blesses the giver; it is repaid to us richly now as well as at the last day.

18. But I have all, and abound: I am full, having received of Epaphroditus the things which were sent from you, an odour of a sweet smell, a sacrifice acceptable, wellpleasing to God.

What a grateful and contented heart the apostle had! Some people would have acknowledged the presents grudgingly, complained of such or such things not being among them, would have at least magnified their own need of help. But he is delighted with what was sent him, says that it has supplied all his wants, magnifies the charity as a holy and precious thing.

19. But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.

Lord, give me a discerning heart and liberal hand to supply the needs of Thy people, and so minister to Thee. I know that money committed to Thy keeping is well laid out. Some day my turn may come to be in need or affliction; let me by helping others now win from Thy mercy divine and human comforts then.

20. Now unto God and our Father be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Glory be to God for loving hearts and deeds of kindness, for His wise providence which works a good result out of this tangled world, for the good examples and wise counsels which help us towards heaven! If we can say and sing this now, with what fuller knowledge and love we shall utter it hereafter!

21. Salute every saint in Christ Jesus. The brethren which are with me greet you. 22. All the saints salute you, chiefly they that are of Cæsar's household.

In Cæsar's household, amidst all the grandeur, luxury, and sin that abounded, Christ our Lord had His servants too. Who knows what pure affections, and devout prayers, and deeds of mercy, went up towards God even from Nero's court? There are many saints hidden from the world, but known to God. Their good influence helps unseen to stem the tide of evil. Let us seek out

such for our friends. What greater help is there for any one than to have good and pure souls to look up to and trust in?

*23. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all.
Amen.*

This is the remedy for our complaints, the saving grace of Christ. This precious gift was bought by the Saviour's own Blood, and He still bestows it on us to strengthen, enlighten, and comfort. If grace is with us we need not fear the loss of this world's favour. God grant it to us when we most need it, in the hour of temptation, and when we are about to die.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE COLOSSIANS.

CHAPTER I.

1. After salutation he thanketh God for their faith, 7. confirmeth the doctrine of Epaphras, 9. prayeth further for their increase in grace, 14. describeth the true Christ, 21. encourageth them to receive Jesus Christ, and commendeth his own ministry.

PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God, and Timotheus our brother, 2. to the saints and faithful brethren in Christ which are at Colosse: Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Colosse, the place where these Christians lived, was a city in Asia Minor, of which only a few ruins can be traced now; but they were members of the Holy Catholic Church of Christ, which has lived and flourished ever since apostolic days. Though their town has perished, and their daily life is unknown to us, and they themselves have long passed away from this world, yet they are one with us in the grace they received, the faith they confessed, the mercy of God in Christ Jesus which they made their own. Words of counsel and comfort which the imprisoned apostle wrote to them will suit our case also.

3. We give thanks to God and the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, praying always for you, 4. since we heard of your faith in Christ Jesus, and of the love which ye have to all the saints,

All our prayers should begin thus, with thanksgiving for benefits received. Yet how can we always pray? S. Paul means by "always praying," that he always desired his friends' welfare, always bore in mind God's goodness and their needs, and exercised this feeling whenever he could in distinct acts of intercession. He was deeply grateful for all God had done for them, and earnestly

desired their edification, their perseverance. Is there not ample reason for us to give thanks, and also to make prayers, when we look round at our friends, and consider their history and needs?

5. For the hope which is laid up for you in heaven, whereof ye heard before in the word of the truth of the gospel ;

We do not serve God for reward. He is true, merciful, and holy. It is our best happiness to be His here below. Yet we know that those who love Him will find eternal joy. The consideration that our true welfare at last will be the outcome of our perseverance in faith and duty here is a part of ourselves. We cannot lay it aside. Thank God for quickening our dull hearts with such a glorious hope.

6. Which is come unto you, as it is in all the world ; and bringeth forth fruit, as it doth also in you, since the day ye heard of it, and knew the grace of God in truth :

Ah ! can we say that the gospel bears fruit and grows in us ? No doubt it increases outwardly in the world, wins new nations, erects new strongholds, but how about our own hearts ? What progress is there to be seen within, what fruits of holy thoughts, fervent prayers, sins overcome ? Lord, grant that we may now at last share in Thy grace and be truly Thine. Too long we have known without loving.

7. As ye also learned of Epaphras our dear fellowservant, who is for you a faithful minister of Christ ;

This view of the sacred ministry represents it in a humble light. It is a servant's work, Christ being the Master, and Christian ministers only His servants ; nay, more, Christians being the masters, and pastors being their servants too, bound to wait on and attend to them. Yet it is a great honour for frail mortals to be called to this holy service. Infinite comfort, endless rewards, may be won by a faithful performance of it.

8. Who also declared unto us your love in the Spirit.

This was good news ; not that his friends were rich, or learned, or successful, but that God's Spirit had quickened their hearts with love. Earthly love is a bright flower, but soon withers up. Spiritual love, that keeps God in mind and looks to eternity, is a deep-rooted plant which lasts on through storms. This love alone is pure, peaceable, and long-suffering.

9. For this cause we also, since the day we heard it, do not cease to pray for you, and to desire that ye might be filled with the knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding ;

Yes, religion has its own enlargement of mind. God's Will, God's mysteries, God's holy law, are well worth our study. How much we need to make progress in this science ! What we have yet learned is but little compared to the great depths that remain behind. Holy Scripture invites our attention, and has more and more interest for those who rightly use it. This kind of learning will profit us for time and eternity.

10. That ye might walk worthy of the Lord unto all pleasing, being fruitful in every good work, and increasing in the knowledge of God ;

Ah ! that is the end of knowledge, that we may lead a good life. Good works should go along with good thoughts. Let all my knowledge be of this kind, leading me to please God and help others. Unless I please my heavenly Master it is useless to win men's applause. Lord, Thou hast set me in Thy garden to bear fruit, enrolled me among Thy servants to do work, put me in Thy school to learn Thy Will. May I behave suitably to all Thy choices.

11. Strengthened with all might, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness ;

Some people say, " We want a happy, healthy religion. Do not give us so much talk about pain and suffering and the Cross." But consider how frail we are, how great sorrows and temptations surround us. Consider how few lead quite prosperous lives. One who knows hearts will thank God for the strength, the peace, the comfort which Christ's Cross brings into a suffering world.

12. Giving thanks unto the Father, which hath made us meet to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in light :

There are two kingdoms, one of darkness, one of light. God's mercy has rescued Christians from the one and set them in the other. Our inheritance of grace has fallen to us in Christ's Church. Here is the Canaan which our Divine Conqueror won for us. Let us continue His faithful soldiers, that all darkness may be uprooted from within. If we remain sincere, upright, and pure, by His grace, we shall soon obtain our inheritance of glory.

13. Who hath delivered us from the power of darkness, and hath translated us into the kingdom of his dear Son :

Here is our exodus : slavery lies behind, joy and freedom in front. As the Israelites passed through the Red Sea and left Pharaoh's tyranny behind, as Jesus our Lord rose from the grave leaving mortality and pain there, so Christians have passed from bondage to freedom, from death to life. What behaviour suits us who are redeemed, who enjoy present graces, and glorious promises !

14. In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins :

Prisoners in old time were ransomed from their chains and dungeon by some friend who paid a sum of money for them. Then they were set free, and returned home rejoicing. Our dear Lord ransoms us from the devil's tyranny, sets free our souls first, and will one day redeem our bodies too. He paid a costly price for us. Ransomed prisoners must not forget that rich and merciful Friend Whose love has rescued them. It would be treachery, as well as exceeding folly, for them to make terms with His and their enemy, and wear his heavy chain again.

15. Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature :

Consider Jesus Christ (1) in relation to God. He is the Image of our heavenly Father, has the same glory and majesty with Him, manifests Him to creatures. The infinite wisdom, power, and love of God, which pass all our understanding, can be surveyed in the Divine Person of Christ. Glory be to God for His condescension in thus enabling us to look upon His unapproachable light ! May we ever approach Him reverently in His dear Son.

16. For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: 17. and he is before all things, and by him all things consist.

Next (2) in reference to creatures. God's Son was before all things. He designed them, brought them into being, upholds them there. Unseen spiritual powers, visible earthly splendours, whatever is mighty, or wise, or long-enduring, must yet own Him for Master. May we obey and serve Him, as is meet and right, and our bounden duty. He has lent such wealth, such power to frail mortals for a while, that they forget He is their true Lord, and will require an account from them.

18. And he is the head of the body, the church : who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the pre-eminence.

Lastly (3) with reference to the Church. He only is the Head of the Church, and its true Priest, and prevailing Sacrifice, and ever-present Lord, and future glorious recompense. How can we understand the Church rightly except we discern by faith the Lord Jesus as present therein, partaking in its life, sharing its woes and triumphs ? He rose from the dead not for Himself only, but for us, beginning a new Divine life there, bringing thence power to quicken soul and body.

19. For it pleased the Father that in him should all fulness dwell;

All fulness means all perfection, all love, all glory. Jesus our Lord is all that our hearts can desire. He never wears out nor changes. He is able to save now as in apostolic days. This is a well that we can never exhaust, an abyss of love and power where we can hide from the world's assaults. Who that has known the fulness of Christ's salvation can set much store on this vain perishing world?

20. And, having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him to reconcile all things unto himself; by him, I say, whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven.

"Forth goes the standard of the King, the sign of signs, the radiant Cross
On which He died our souls to bring from hell and from eternal loss;
Pierced by the spear He yielded forth water and blood, a mingled tide,
That so a well of priceless worth might flow to sinners from His side."

21. And you, that were some time alienated and enemies in your mind by wicked works, yet now hath he reconciled 22. in the body of his flesh through death, to present you holy and unblameable and unreprouable in his sight:

We, too, shared in the fall and its results. We were naturally inclined to evil, and on the road to misery. We know the deceits of our own heart. But we, too, have shared in Christ's atoning Death and glorious Resurrection. We derive grace and hope from what He did for us. Here are three questions worth asking. What was our spiritual condition by nature? What should we now become if left to ourselves? What does God's mercy mean us to be?

23. If ye continue in the faith grounded and settled, and be not moved away from the hope of the gospel, which ye have heard, and which was preached to every creature which is under heaven; whereof I Paul am made a minister;

Lord, make us persevere. Grant that our faith and life may be built on the true foundation, and not be moved by any storms of adversity, temptation, or doubt. May we confirm our faith by the constant and reverent study of Thy Holy Word. Indeed all creatures have not heard it yet; may we in our place contribute to spreading it abroad.

24. Who now rejoice in my sufferings for you, and fill up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ in my flesh for his body's sake, which is the church:

Christ's sufferings, in one sense, are perfect, and need no filling up

God's Son bore all agony, atoned for all sins, left us a perfect example. In Himself there is nothing lacking ; yet, in His Church, He suffers still. All the patience of saints, all the tears, the crosses, the long agonies of believing souls, are yet Christ's sufferings in them. He bears in them, and helps them to bear. He unites their pains with His life-giving Cross. When our turn comes to suffer let us taste the bitter cup cheerfully, as being the same which was put to our Saviour's lips.

25. Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfil the word of God ;

Paul's aim was to fulfil God's Word by accomplishing what it enjoined, bringing about what it promised, declaring it in its completeness to all men. This was his life's work. Christians should each in their place have the same object before them. Be it ours to obey, fulfil, accomplish God's Word, not resist it vainly. It will be fulfilled either by us or against us.

26. Even the mystery which hath been hid from ages and from generations, but now is made manifest to his saints : 27. to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery among the Gentiles ; which is Christ in you, the hope of glory : -

Have we learnt this mystery ? It is the doctrine of the communion of saints, the union of redeemed hearts with God through the Spirit of Christ dwelling in them. Such a thing was long hidden from the world. Even now it is scoffed at or unknown by many. Yet there are those who know it and feel its refreshment and strength daily. It is a great mystery, yet true, that God should be our God, and we His children.

28. Whom we preach, warning every man, and teaching every man in all wisdom ; that we may present every man perfect in Christ Jesus :

Lord, how I have forgotten the lesson of this verse ! Thy grace belongs to every one. All the poor have a share in it, the ignorant, the children, outcasts ; all who have the use of reason can learn about Thee and serve Thee. The gospel is not a special privilege of a few elect souls, but the message of Him Who made and redeemed us to all the souls whom He has purchased. God has for each of us some counsel, some promises, some hope.

29. Whereunto I also labour, striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily.

Not my own strength but Thine, not my own wisdom, my own holiness, my own power. I have and am nothing. All good that

I can do depends, first of all, on the honest acknowledgment of my own weakness, which is but too real. Only I know of One Who is Almighty, Whose love and power will not fail me. My desperate frailty drives me to cling to His all-powerful Hand. Where I see no way He can guide me.

CHAPTER II.

1. *He still exhorteth them to be constant in Christ, 8. to beware of philosophy, and vain traditions, 18. worshipping of angels, 20. and legal ceremonies, which are ended in Christ.*

FOR *I would that ye knew what great conflict I have for you, and for them at Laodicea, and for as many as have not seen my face in the flesh;*

The apostle's yearning heart could not be bound by chains or long distances of sea or land ; it supplied the want of personal knowledge. These Christians were in the East, he confined at Rome. He had never seen their town, knew few of their names ; yet he felt for their dangers, rejoiced in their victories, longed to help them. He put selfishness far away. All Christian souls were dear to him, and claimed his love and prayers.

2. *That their hearts might be comforted, being knit together in love, and unto all riches of the full assurance of understanding, to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ ;*

He wished his friends three things. First, may they be comforted in their troubles, have a store of joy and peace amidst the rough shocks of the world. Next, may they be knit together, live in unity, feel their fellowship with each other in Christ. Lastly, may they grow in the knowledge of Divine truth, which is able to satisfy their deepest thoughts. I, too, desire to feel this comfort, live in this fellowship, study these mysteries.

3. *In whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.*

Here is our Master, our Book, our Light. All truth is given us by Him, and is in harmony with His Divine life and saving work as recorded in Scripture. He has the key of all knowledge ; He cannot deceive or be deceived. Let us in all humility learn of Him, and so be preparing for the unveiled knowledge which another life may bring.

4. And this I say, lest any man should beguile you with enticing words. 5. For though I be absent in the flesh, yet am I with you in the spirit, joying and beholding your order, and the stedfastness of your faith in Christ.

It pleased the apostle to think of his friends as shewing an orderly array, and maintaining a solid stedfastness. This is the Christian soldier's duty : let him march in order and at the word ; let him be unmoveable and firm as a rock when the shock of battle comes. S. Paul could not now witness his friends' courage, but he rejoiced to think of it, and only desired that they might persevere.

6. As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him :

Having been made heirs of everlasting salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ, may we continue God's servants, and attain His promises ! We need indeed to grow in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ ; we need to abolish the whole body of sin ; we need to follow Christ's example daily, and become like Him. But still it is the same grace, the same life, the same Saviour with which we have begun. God has planted the seed of heaven in us. We do not need any fresh salvation.

7. Rooted and built up in him, and stablished in the faith, as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving.

Christ is the root from which we grow, the foundation on which we rise, the cement which binds our spiritual life together. His great mercy has taught us the truth, His love guided us so far on our way. What gratitude of ours is sufficient for His great love ? Shall we forget this best of all friends ?

8. Beware lest any man spoil you through philosophy and vain deceit, after the tradition of men, after the rudiments of the world, and not after Christ.

Here are the enemies against which we are warned. S. Paul is our sentinel, and bids us be on our guard, for foes are near. Philosophy, or human reasoning, is one ; tradition, or human custom, is another. Both would rob us of our faith, our devotion, our hope ; both need to be kept in their place, and to be resisted boldly if they conflict with our Master's orders.

9. For in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily.

In the Old Testament God dwelt in the holy place over the mercy-seat. He dwells by His grace in believing hearts, nay, His providence dwells in all the world. His wisdom and power are in all

things ; but the union of Godhead with our nature in the person of our dear Saviour is different from any of these indwellings. In Christ is all Divine glory, love, and wisdom. We adore Him as our Lord, we trust in Him for time and eternity. Worship paid to Him is worship to our God Himself.

10. And ye are complete in him, which is the head of all principality and power :

Christ is made one with us in our baptism, gives us fresh strength in confirmation, nourishes our spirit in holy communion, refreshes and comforts us by many means and helps. Saints and angels are but His instruments, His servants. All good they do to us is of His gift. It is He Who sends us blessings through them.

11. In whom also ye are circumcised with the circumcision made without hands, in putting off the body of the sins of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ :

Holy Baptism is (1) a removal of our old sinful nature. It is a spiritual or figurative taking away of that burden of guilt which presses on all Adam's children. Christ the Lord has substituted this for the literal rite of circumcision which marked the old law. He would have baptized Christians live a life separate and apart from sin.

12. Buried with him in baptism, wherein also ye are risen with him through the faith of the operation of God, who hath raised him from the dead.

Holy Baptism is (2) a burial with Christ ; we share therein His sepulchre. The water represents to us that rocky grave in which he lay on Easter Eve, and where His new risen life began. All our life through there should be something of this sepulchre left within our hearts, something of retirement, of purity, of hidden life known to Jesus only.

13. And you, being dead in your sins and the uncircumcision of your flesh, hath he quickened together with him, having forgiven you all trespasses ;

It is (3) a gift of new life, free from guilt, free from death, sharing in Christ's triumph. There is no limit to this forgiveness, no darkness that can quench this light. Only be faithful to your Lord, and He will soon destroy all the remnants of evil that cling to you, and will set you at home in His palace, where your room is ready.

14. Blotting out the handwriting of ordinances that was against us, which was contrary to us, and took it out of the way, nailing it to his cross ;

I could not fulfil God's righteous commandments ; the ordinances of Moses' law were a burden I could not bear. I had contracted an infinite debt to Divine justice which I could not pay ; so my dear Lord intervened to save me from ruin. He took this heavy account which I had no funds to discharge, satisfied it in my stead, and then blotted it out and drove the nails of His Cross through it. Now I know it is paid, now I know it cannot stand against me.

15. And having spoiled principalities and powers, he made a shew of them openly, triumphing over them in it.

Thy triumph, O Lord, was through shame and agony. Thy Cross was the weapon, the chariot, the trophy of war. May I boldly encounter reproach and shame for Thy sake, and so come to share at last in Thy glorious reward ! All powers of heaven and earth were beaten by the Crucified One, our souls dragged off in triumph, our access to heaven won, and this was done by what seemed to human eyes the extremity of humiliation.

16. Let no man therefore judge you in meat, or in drink, or in respect of an holyday, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath days :

Jewish distinctions of clean and unclean food, of special days to be observed every year, or month, or week, are all gone. Christians are not bound by them. Yet we are not free from the obligation of self-denial for our own and our brethren's sake, or from the rule of Festival and Fast which Christ's Church has laid down. This, however, is a spiritual law, and proceeds from within. Believe in Christ Jesus, love His people, and then you will hit the right measure of observance.

17. Which are a shadow of things to come ; but the body is of Christ.

Christ gives the reality of what the old law represented in figure. The true Paschal Lamb is His atoning sacrifice. Unleavened bread is purity and sincerity of heart. Sabbath-days are spiritual rest and peace, a mind hid in God. Canaan, and long life there, is our heavenly inheritance. All Jewish rites, days, precepts, find a true meaning in the gospel.

18. Let no man beguile you of your reward in a voluntary humility and worshipping of angels, intruding into those things which he hath not seen, vainly puffed up by his fleshly mind,

The angels are holy creatures of God, appointed to serve Him and minister to us, yet I do not address them in prayer, or seek to hold intercourse with them. I cannot tell that they read my heart, or

that they have power to answer my prayers. No, I will hold communion with their Master and my Redeemer. He came down to take my nature in order that I might find in Him a Friend ever at hand.

19. And not holding the Head, from which all the body by joints and bands having nourishment ministered, and knit together, increaseth with the increase of God.

God would have us grow in grace. Our spiritual life is withering up if it does not increase, and the means of this growth is nourishment. Jesus Christ is the living Bread. Our souls must feed on Him through prayer and sacraments if they would live. Grant, Lord, that when bodily life becomes weak, yet that my soul may be alive, that I may enjoy more and more of Thy grace.

20. Wherefore if ye be dead with Christ from the rudiments of the world, why, as though living in the world, are ye subject to ordinances, 21. (touch not; taste not; handle not; 22. which all are to perish with the using;) after the commandments and doctrines of men?

The gospel has abolished the law. Christ's Death, which was represented and applied to us in Holy Baptism, has done away with the old prohibitions about unclean food. All God's creatures are fit to be used by us in moderation and thankfulness. One is as good as another as far as our spiritual life is concerned. The apostle does not forbid Christians from making rules for themselves as regards their food or drink, or manner of life. He always practised and recommended self-denial; but what he says is that such things are indifferent in themselves. God meant them to support our bodies, not affect our souls.

23. Which things have indeed a shew of wisdom in will worship, and humility, and neglecting of the body; not in any honour to the satisfying of the flesh.

Then true religion does not consist in mere abstinence from certain things, nor in observing certain ceremonies, nor in taking certain words on our lips. No, it goes much deeper than that. A religion that was merely outward would have little power to regulate the heart or repress temptation. True religion means knowing God's goodness and our own nothingness, and submitting ourselves wholly to His Divine Will. Nothing but this will stand in the hour of trial.

CHAPTER III.

1. *He sheweth where we should seek Christ.* 5. *He exhorteth to mortification, 10. to put off the old man, and to put on Christ, 12. exhorting to charity, humility, and other several duties.*

IF ye then be risen with Christ, seek those things which are above, where Christ sitteth on the right hand of God.

Lift up your hearts. Do not let anything of this earth wholly satisfy you. There are scenes of glory, depths of purity and love, which eternity has in reserve, and which put to shame all this world's splendours. Our Divine Master, Who once lived and died and rose again upon this poor earth, has now entered into heavenly glory, and bids us hold communion with Him there.

2. *Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*

Our affections cannot be wholly set on things heavenly and things earthly at the same time. In the latter is no true satisfaction, no repose, no security. Indeed we must use them, and this as responsible creatures, but our best thoughts and dearest hopes must be beyond.

3. *For ye are dead, and your life is hid with Christ in God.*

This hidden life of the Christian is like that of trees in winter-time. They may shew no sign of leaf or flower, but the life is there within, and will appear when spring comes. Christians do not display their devotion, or talk much about their converse with the Lord Jesus, but He knows who are His friends. He receives their prayers, accepts their good works. Whatever storm comes they have an abiding peace which flows from above.

4. *When Christ, who is our life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with him in glory.*

One day the veil will be withdrawn ; one day body and soul will obtain everlasting life. This word "glory" means more than we can now understand. It is the sight of God, the possession of peace and love ; it is security and freedom from cares, pain, and death ; it includes all gifts that our God can give to His chosen. The thought of this great reward encourages us to give up the world's pleasures ; they are little compared with eternal joy.

5. Mortify therefore your members which are upon the earth; fornication, uncleanness, inordinate affection, evil concupiscence, and covetousness, which is idolatry:

Mortify evil desires because you are Christians, and have received pardon and a Divine inheritance. Indeed, all the mortification in the world would never win us heaven. That was done by Christ's Cross. But yet if we do not deny ourselves we may lose it again. Foul desires, covetous longings, may rob us of what is infinitely precious. Let our desire be to uproot evil dreams from within, and substitute only pure and upright thoughts such as we need not be ashamed of.

6. For which things' sake the wrath of God cometh on the children of disobedience:

The heathen drew down God's wrath by leading vicious lives. Much more would He be provoked by the sins of Christians, who know their duty better. Remember we cannot be as they are. Our ears have heard God's call, our eyes have seen His truth. If we led heathen lives our guilt would be far greater, our misery deeper.

7. In the which ye also walked some time, when ye lived in them.

Old sins are bitter to think of, yet they serve as warnings now, and also remind us how great was that Divine mercy which sought out and found the lost sheep. It is not without some danger that I reflect on what I was, and on what I might easily have become, but I rely all the more on that great goodness which has rescued me.

8. But now ye also put off all these; anger, wrath, malice, blasphemy, filthy communication out of your mouth.

In daily life we are tempted to all these faults. Those who mix with the rough world know how angry, profane, and foul words spread around, how they beset our path, how ready we are to return such again. How can we get through the day unsullied unless we are very careful over our prayers? A few minutes' thought of God and our duty every day is indispensable if we would be unmoved in the hour of trial.

9. Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds; 10. and have put on the new man, which is renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him:

Will God recognise us for His children? Does He see in us the like-

ness of His dear Son, a character of truth, of wisdom, of love, imperfect indeed as yet, but still striving for conformity to Christ's pattern. Our old nature had become corrupt, it had fallen from its first excellence ; so God was pleased in His mercy to create it afresh in Christ, and thus set forth a new standard for humanity. O Lord, may Thy dear Son's holiness, mercy, purity, be my pattern ; may I strive to fashion my ways after His !

11. Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcision nor uncircumcision, Barbarian, Scythian, bond nor free : but Christ is all, and in all.

The unbelieving world was broken up into sharp divisions of privileged and unprivileged. Jews had nothing in common with Greeks, civilised nations with barbarians, freemen with slaves. But the gospel has revealed a heavenly Father, a Divine Redeemer, a common faith and love for all alike. O marvellous change ! What but Divine grace could overthrow the tremendous barriers that existed between men ? Let us beware lest our unbelief build them up again.

12. Put on therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, bowels of mercies, kindness, humbleness of mind, meekness, long-suffering ;

Here is clothing for the inward man. If we have not this temper our souls are but bare and naked. God, Who requires these graces, can give and increase them. If we feel our own coldness, impatience, hardness, then all the more need for us to seek from Jesus, the Fountain of all mercy, some portion of that tender compassion, that humbleness and patience which distinguished Him.

13. Forbearing one another, and forgiving one another, if any man have a quarrel against any : even as Christ forgave you, so also do ye.

There is almost daily opportunity for putting this verse into practice. We seldom are long without encountering some annoyance, some provocation, without having to bear with some disagreeable word. O Lord, teach us to take all such accidents as our training for heaven. May we lift up our hearts to Thy example, and learn from Thee how to receive injuries. If we are forgiven, and at peace, and heirs of heaven, how little this world's insults and losses really matter !

14. And above all these things put on charity, which is the bond of perfectness.

This is the tie which binds us together most closely. Christ's Church would fall asunder but for love. Those who love are drawn to

each other, and can enter into each other's hearts. It is the want of love that splits up the world, and makes so many spend all their strength in opposing and hindering their brethren's efforts. Love knits together all that is good in our own character, makes it solid, consistent, and persevering. Finally, love unites both our brethren and ourselves to God.

15. And let the peace of God rule in your hearts, to the which also ye are called in one body; and be ye thankful.

If peace rules, how easily contests will be settled! only it must be true Divine peace, not merely laziness, or a desire to save appearances. What a happy household that will be where peace gives orders, decides controversies, directs tongues, performs duties!

16. Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom; teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.

What were these hymns the first Christians used to sing? No doubt they were the Psalms of David, which the Church has always used from the beginning, and such others as the Te Deum, "Glory be to God on high," and the other canticles. Christians always put their faith and trust and gratitude into the form of hymns. They were not ashamed to praise God with heart and voice, with body and soul.

17. And whatsoever ye do in word or deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus, giving thanks to God and the Father by him.

We approach the throne of God by Jesus Christ, for He is our High Priest and Intercessor—with Him, for we plead His Sacrifice as our only acceptable offering—in Him, as His members and sharing His life—after Him, as He is our pattern, and His holy life the model by which we should walk—under Him, receiving His orders, following His banner, adoring Him as our King. When the end of life comes, may we breathe our last with this same spirit of faith and thankfulness, disposing ourselves to follow God's holy Will elsewhere!

18. Wives, submit yourselves unto your own husbands, as it is fit in the Lord.

Submission is the way of happiness. We are all God's creatures, and owe Him obedience, and God has set us to learn this lesson in various places of dependence upon one another here on earth. Christ Jesus, Who loved His holy mother, and His friends Martha and Mary, specially assigned to women this method of perfection,

as suitable to their true excellence. They should submit, not on any grounds of inferiority, but because heavenly grace is thus won, and Christ's orders fulfilled.

19. Husbands, love your wives, and be not bitter against them.

How many married lives that have begun in good promise have ended in misery, through forgetfulness of these wise words ! The husband must join with the wife in daily prayer, must go with her to God's house, must seek from God grace to live in peace and love with her. However well to do and successful he may be, yet if he lacks union of heart with his wife, he is badly off.

20. Children, obey your parents in all things : for this is well pleasing unto the Lord

This injunction has no limit except what the law of God requires us to put to it. Our heavenly Father is best pleased by obedience, duty, honour, shewn to our earthly parents. This was the plan on which Christ Himself went, and which He bequeathed to us. Indeed occasions have occurred, and may occur again, where children have had to disregard their parents' bidding and follow that of God instead ; they could not reconcile the two. But for one instance of that, our own conscience will supply us with a thousand memories of wilful disobedience and ingratitude.

21. Fathers, provoke not your children to anger, lest they be discouraged.

To provoke means here to punish excessively or passionately. Those foolish parents provoke their children who revile them with hasty words, never seem satisfied with them, shew them no love. Fathers are here warned that the result of such treatment is to produce sullenness, dulness, and utter discouragement in the child's mind.

22. Servants, obey in all things your masters according to the flesh ; not with eyeservice, as menpleasers ; but in singleness of heart, fearing God :

Give us, Lord, this singleness of heart, that we may have

" One law for darkness and for light."

Let us behave in the same manner when alone as in the presence of our superiors. Let Thy holy fear never forsake us.

23. And whatsoever ye do, do it heartily, as to the Lord, and not unto men ;

Service will be well done if we do it for Christ's sake and in obedi-

ence to His orders. Whatever our work is, be it of the roughest or humblest kind, it may be done in the best way possible, and offered in sacrifice to God. Be sure of this, our heavenly Master would have no tasks hurried over carelessly, or left half-done. He requires of us the best we can do.

24. Knowing that of the Lord ye shall receive the reward of the inheritance : for ye serve the Lord Christ.

We serve a grateful Master, Who recognises our love and duty, though it be unappreciated by men. We expect a bountiful reward, though our labours may be poorly paid in this world. Let us look forward to that great settling-day when an unerring Voice will say, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

25. But he that doeth wrong shall receive for the wrong which he hath done : and there is no respect of persons.

Slave laws assume that the slave is a piece of property and has no rights ; but the gospel gave him both rights and duties, bade him be honest, be patient, be obedient, for Christ's sake ; taught him of a heavenly judgment which should redress this world's inequalities. There is no respect of persons with God ; He will not spare the mighty for their grandeur, or excuse the mean for their littleness. He knows how to deal with each soul.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He exhorteth them to be fervent in prayer, 5. to walk wisely toward them that are not yet come to the true knowledge of Christ. 10. He saluteth them, and wisheth them all prosperity.

MASTERS, give unto your servants that which is just and equal ; knowing that ye also have a Master in heaven.

For a while we have inferiors, we have those set under us whom we perhaps have power to ill-use or neglect ; but for eternity we are under God's hands, He has power over us, He can dispose of us for ever. Such as we have been to those over whom we are, such will God be to us. Those who have been hard on the helpless will themselves find severe judgment.

2. Continue in prayer, and watch in the same with thanksgiving ;

Continue perseveringly your seasons of prayer, your attendance at God's house, your preparation for His Holy Table. God is not weary of giving, nor should we be of asking. His mercies descend,

and our prayers should ascend, daily. Again, our prayers should be watchful and thankful. He has His seasons of grace, His times for refreshment ; let us not miss them by formal and indifferent prayers.

3. Withal praying also for us, that God would open unto us a door of utterance, to speak the mystery of Christ, for which I am also in bonds :

S. Paul desires a door to be opened, not so much for his own escape from prison, as for God's Word to pass into attentive hearts. That is his chief concern, that the gospel be free, flourish, abound, bring forth fruit, whatever becomes of himself. He felt that all this depended greatly on prayer. If Christian prayers ascended to God on his behalf he knew they would be heard.

4. That I may make it manifest, as I ought to speak.

There is then a right way and a wrong way of delivering religious truth. The apostle bade his friends entreat for him that he might find the right way. O Lord, help us when we have to speak on serious subjects. Grant us courage, reverence, a tender regard for the weak, and yet a resolve to speak the full truth. Unless Thou open our lips, how shall we bear true witness for Thee ?

5. Walk in wisdom toward them that are without, redeeming the time.

This verse treats of our behaviour towards unbelievers. Christians in those days were placed in difficult circumstances by being in the midst of heathens, and under heathen laws. How much discretion it needed to give no needless offence, and to seize the right moment to lead souls towards Christ ! There is still much occasion for this wisdom nowadays, when believers are set amidst scoffers. We must so order our words, our ways, as to bring no shame on our dear Master, Who is as yet unknown to many.

6. Let your speech be always with grace, seasoned with salt, that ye may know how ye ought to answer every man.

Grace here means pleasantness or kindness. Salt means good sense. Our conversation should have these two characteristics ; be both agreeable and useful. Lord, may it be so in future. I have not thought enough of the grave responsibility I am under for my words. How much bitterness, how much folly, are apt to creep into my talk !

7. All my state shall Tychicus declare unto you, who is a beloved brother, and a faithful minister and fellowservant in the Lord:

Tychicus was a beloved brother, that is, a dear companion and friend. He was also a faithful minister or attendant on the apostle in his afflictions. He was also a fellow-servant with him of one Divine Master. S. Paul was greatly blest, in all his troubles, by the loyalty of such a heart. How thankful should we be when God has, in like manner, raised up for us some one on whom to lean securely !

8. *Whom I have sent unto you for the same purpose, that he might know your estate, and comfort your hearts;*

I am afraid I have greatly neglected my brethren. There are many suffering under the cross of great poverty, of long sickness, or of sorrow, whom I have left alone, and scarcely troubled to inquire for. How different was S. Paul's method ! How much thought he bestowed on all those who had trials to bear !

9. *With Onesimus, a faithful and beloved brother, who is one of you. They shall make known unto you all things which are done here.*

We may read more about Onesimus in the Epistle of S. Paul to Philemon. He was but a slave, and little esteemed in the world, but the gospel raises those that are of low estate. Though he had no rights in the eye of the law, he was magnified by faith, he became trustworthy, precious, a helper both of the apostle and of his own countrymen. His name is handed down in Holy Scripture. Glory to God, Who turns weakness and shame into honour.

10. *Aristarchus my fellowprisoner saluteth you, and Marcus, sister's son to Barnabas, (touching whom ye received commandments : if he come unto you, receive him ;)*

Once Mark had turned back from missionary work (Acts xiii. 13). Once he had been the cause of disagreement between Paul and Barnabas (Acts xv. 39), but now all that had passed away. He was again S. Paul's friend and helper, more cherished and more useful than he had ever been. Thank God for clearing away misunderstandings. May we have the opportunity of speaking or writing a kind word to all those who have been separated from us by some quarrel in bygone days.

11. *And Jesus, which is called Justus, who are of the circumcision. These only are my fellowworkers unto the kingdom of God, which have been a comfort unto me.*

These three were Jews, and yet they stood firm by the apostle. Most of the Jewish Christians in Rome were lukewarm in supporting him. They were influenced by the strong feeling of their nation against S. Paul. When we have to choose our side let us seek for

a courageous heart, not to be afraid of men. God will one day reward those who have stood by His servants against a scornful world.

12. *Epaphras, who is one of you, a servant of Christ, saluteth you, always labouring fervently for you in prayers, that ye may stand perfect and complete in all the will of God.*

Epaphras was deeply anxious for his flock at Colosse, now separated from him by long spaces of sea and land, so he betook himself daily to prayer for them. He sought that they might know God's Will, might do it, might persevere to the end. He could not, in his absence, visit or teach them, but this he could do, pray. Our anxieties should take the form of intercession for those we love. We should regard this as an important work, a true striving for them, presenting them severally before God, entreating for their needs. Our Saviour's prayers were of this kind, earnest and repeated.

13. *For I bear him record, that he hath a great zeal for you, and them that are in Laodicea, and them in Hierapolis.*

These three neighbour cities, the Christians in which were so dear to the heart of Epaphras, are now all waste and ruinous. The light of the gospel has been extinguished there for centuries. Yet, no doubt, numberless living stones have been taken from thence to build up the heavenly Jerusalem. Do not grieve too much over the cessation of a good work, or the passing away of a faithful ministry. Zeal and prayer are never lost ; results remain in heaven, if they are not to be found on earth.

14. *Luke, the beloved physician, and Demas, greet you.*

Luke and Demas are together now ; they share the apostle's prison, join in his letters ; yet only one of them persevered at his side. He tells us (2 Tim. iv. 10) that Demas forsook him at last, "having loved this present world." Lord, grant us to remain Thine, continue our prayers, our communions, our good works ; let our only change be to deeper love and more hearty prayers ; keep the enticing world away.

15. *Salute the brethren which are in Laodicea, and Nympha, and the church which is in his house.* 16. *And when this epistle is read among you, cause that it be read also in the church of the Laodiceans ; and that ye likewise read the epistle from Laodicea.*

Here the value of studying Holy Scripture is insisted on. We are able to read not only this one Epistle to the Colossians, but many that S. Paul and other apostles wrote. We, too, are their disciples ;

they teach and comfort us. But are we able to read this other Epistle that was to come from Laodicea, or is it one of those which have perished? There can be no certainty about this, for it has pleased God that many letters which the apostle wrote have not come down to us, but it is most probable that what we know as the Epistle to the Ephesians is meant here. That seems to have been a circular letter written about this time to the churches of Asia, among which Laodicea was very eminent. Anyhow, let us thank God for the Epistles that we have, and daily study them. There is enough in them to enlighten us for this life, till we come to a clearer knowledge hereafter.

17. And say to Archippus, Take heed to the ministry which thou hast received in the Lord, that thou fulfil it.

Ah! take heed, the ministry is a grave matter. It requires great diligence, high aims, fervent love. God bestows it, and will reward its faithful discharge. How easy it is even for the best of us to grow lukewarm! We need a warning like this to awaken us. It is not enough to become Christ's ministers; we must fulfil all His business, do all His work well.

18. The salutation by the hand of me Paul. Remember my bonds. Grace be with you. Amen.

The apostles teach us from the midst of chains and indignities. They gave up liberty, and at last their own lives, for Christ's sake. Their bonds plead with us, bid us be brave, bid us despise the threats and scoffs of men, shew us how little account we should make of all the world's promises. Prisons with Christ have been happier than palaces without Him.

*THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL
THE APOSTLE TO THE
THESSALONIANS.*

CHAPTER I.

1. *The Thessalonians are given to understand both how mindful of them Saint Paul was at all times in thanksgiving, and prayer : 5. and also how well he was persuaded of the truth and sincerity of their faith, and conversion to God.*

PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians which is in God the Father and in the Lord Jesus Christ : Grace be unto you, and peace, from God our Father, and the Lord Jesus Christ.

This is the earliest letter of the apostle Paul which is preserved to us, and it is written to some of his earliest converts in Europe (Acts xvii. 4). He reminds them, first of all, how that they are in God and in Christ. Now they are enfolded in the arms of God's love, rest quietly on His providence, have a new life and new hope through His mercy, find a Friend and Master in His dear Son. The apostle wishes them grace to strengthen them, peace to sober them.

2. *We give thanks to God always for you all, making mention of you in our prayers ;*

Thinking of our friends, we thank God for them, sending up towards heaven again by thanksgiving the many kindnesses, services, good examples, acts of love, which they have bestowed on us ; and we pray God for them, desiring to draw down again for them and for ourselves, by prayer, new mercies and gifts. When we kneel before God we join together these two affections, by turns remembering God's mercies and our own and others' needs.

3. *Remembering without ceasing your work of faith, and*

labour of love, and patience of hope in our Lord Jesus Christ, in the sight of God and our Father;

Thank God for diligent faith and forbearing love and cheerful hope. What would this sad world be if these graces were not left in it? Let our faith set us to do some work for God, our love make us tender to the suffering, our hope burn brightly even in dark hours; then they will be real graces, and such as God approves.

4. Knowing, brethren beloved, your election of God.

This is the root of prayer. Pray without fearing, for your salvation does not rest on human strength or wisdom, but on God's Almighty power and unsailing promise. If we had to look only to ourselves, what hope would there be? But God's everlasting love has done wonders for us, and we know He will not forsake His children.

5. For our gospel came not unto you in word only, but also in power, and in the Holy Ghost, and in much assurance; as ye know what manner of men we were among you for your sake.

God's Word had come to them with power, with miracles to support it, fervent words, holy examples, Divine gifts in those who declared it; all spoke of God's Presence, and produced conviction in the hearers. Lord, grant Thy servants now, when they preach, such measure of these good gifts as is according to Thy Will.

6. And ye became followers of us, and of the Lord, having received the word in much affliction, with joy of the Holy Ghost:

God's Word was received by them with joy. Their Jewish or heathen fellow-countrymen overwhelmed them with insults or ill-usage for becoming Christians, but the comforts of God's grace more than made up for all they had to suffer. Let this be the experience of Thy servants who in these days have to suffer for their faith; they need Thy grace to turn their afflictions into joy.

7. So that ye were ensamples to all that believe in Macedonia and Achaia. 8. For from you sounded out the word of the Lord not only in Macedonia and Achaia, but also in every place your faith to God-ward is spread abroad; so that we need not to speak any thing.

So they are our examples too. We learn from them this great secret of faith, to give up this world's promises and follow Christ and His saints along the narrow way of self-sacrifice. Let us in our day pass on to others a like example. Our country is England,

and our time many centuries after S. Paul's day, but we can believe and rejoice as Christians did then. Lives speak better than words.

9. For they themselves shew of us what manner of entering in we had unto you, and how ye turned to God from idols to serve the living and true God ;

Leave idols and serve God; not only golden images, but lust and hatred and covetousness and vanity are idols which we must leave; their service is hard and ruinous, whereas our Master is full of love, His service is perfect freedom, His rewards infinite. Lord, teach us to make this experience our own. Thy servants are best off; Thy promises true.

10. And to wait for his Son from heaven, whom he raised from the dead, even Jesus, which delivered us from the wrath to come.

We wait for Christ's coming. Once He died and rose again for us, and one day He will come again in glorious majesty to judge the quick and dead. If we have found pardon through His precious Blood, the wrath to come cannot hurt us. Our sins indeed call for judgment, but His power and mercy are greater than our sins. We wait for Him quietly and patiently, knowing that His time is best.

CHAPTER II.

1. In what manner the gospel was brought and preached to the Thessalonians, and in what sort also they received it. 28. A reason is rendered both why Saint Paul was so long absent from them, and also why he was so desirous to see them.

FOR yourselves, brethren, know our entrance in unto you, that it was not in vain : 2. but even after that we had suffered before, and were shamefully entreated, as ye know, at Philippi, we were bold in our God to speak unto you the gospel of God with much contention.

S. Paul's entrance into Thessalonica was unknown to, or despised by, the world, but glorious in the eyes of faith. He came from his prison at Philippi like a king going forth to make new conquests. Scourging and chains and dismissal from the city were all turned from shame to honour, and served only to win fresh hearts to believe his words. Lord, join us, we pray Thee, to Thy victorious armies. Let us too throw in our lot boldly with Thee, and go forth to spread Thy Name.

3. For our exhortation was not of deceit, nor of uncleanness, nor in guile :

Keep us from false doctrine which deceives, from deadly temptations which corrupt and ruin, from flattery which leads us to seek for the praise of men. We desire to cling to Thy Holy Word and learn what it teaches both of faith and duty. Many have stumbled or been led astray, and so have lost that light by which they once walked.

4. But as we were allowed of God to be put in trust with the gospel, even so we speak ; not as pleasing men, but God, which trieth our hearts.

“ Hush, idle words and thoughts of ill,
Your Lord is listening, peace, be still.”

It is a great honour to be Christians, and a great responsibility too. God has trusted us with His Word and Sacraments, and will require an account of our use of them. The Great King reads thoughts and hears whispers. His judgment outweighs what men say of us.

5. For neither at any time used we flattering words, as ye know, nor a cloke of covetousness ; God is witness :

Many spiritual guides have spoilt their message by flattering men's weakness, many by having an eye to their own worldly profit. S. Paul was on his guard against both these dangers ; he knew how easily human frailty creeps into the holiest employments. Let all our conversation be such as we are not ashamed that God should witness. We can appeal to Him if we are suspected wrongfully.

6. Nor of men sought we glory, neither of you, nor yet of others, when we might have been burdensome, as the apostles of Christ.

Christ's apostles should have been highly honoured, humbly obeyed, treated with all reverence and courtesy ; so much was due to their position. No, S. Paul never looked at things in that light. He was content to work and suffer and be passed over, if only his Master could be welcomed. He considered himself the servant of all, and was willing to live only to do them good.

7. But we were gentle among you, even as a nurse cherisheth her children : 8. so being affectionately desirous of you, we were willing to have imparted unto you, not the gospel of God only, but also our own souls, because ye were dear unto us.

This is the secret of winning souls. Jesus our Lord brought in this

method Himself, and His saints learned it from Him. Alas ! I remember how often my own sharpness, waywardness, overbearing ways, have spoilt my influence for good. One kind word, one act of love, does more to help another soul than endless preaching.

9. For ye remember, brethren, our labour and travail : for labouring night and day, because we would not be chargeable unto any of you, we preached unto you the gospel of God.

He and his friends were all poor ; they had to spare time from their daily labour, or rest, or meals, to speak of or listen to heavenly things. Indeed, the gospel is for the poor. Christ and His apostles led their life and knew its pinches. The consolations and promises were meant first of all for those whose lot in this life was hard ; a prosperous, easy life dims them to our eyes.

10. Ye are witnesses, and God also, how holily and justly and unblameably we behaved ourselves among you that believe : 11. as ye know how we exhorted and comforted and charged every one of you, as a father doth his children, 12. that ye would walk worthy of God, who hath called you unto his kingdom and glory.

Lord, Thou hast called me too, though unworthy, into Thy kingdom, and made me an heir of Thy glory. Help me to behave holily and justly and unblameably in this present life, that I may be reckoned worthy to obtain Thy promises. When deadly sin tempts me, let me tread it down by the remembrance that I am Thine. It is not easy to live always up to such a calling. Thanks be to God for giving me good books, wise teachers, high examples, that help me onward.

13. For this cause also thank we God without ceasing, because, when ye received the word of God which ye heard of us, ye received it not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God, which effectually worketh also in you that believe.

Lord, I acknowledge Thy Almighty power manifested in our redemption—

“ By man has come the infinite display
Of Thy victorious grace.”

Nothing but Divine power could so change the world, quicken hearts, give life to the dead in sin. This is no device of human wisdom, but God's Almighty power displayed for our salvation. O that we could open our hearts to its influence ! its force is not yet spent.

14. For ye, brethren, became followers of the churches of God which in Judea are in Christ Jesus : for ye also have suffered like things of your own countrymen, even as they have of the Jews :

The Christians in Judæa were the first converts of all. They gave up all that they had ; they endured the sharpest contempt and hatred from their unbelieving countrymen ; the first martyrs came from among them ; all true Christians since have been their followers, and walked in their steps. Even in these days God sometimes calls believers to suffer for their faith. Only, unless we learn to give up self-will and pride, how can we endure to part with our goods or life for Christ's sake ?

15. Who both killed the Lord Jesus, and their own prophets, and have persecuted us ; and they pleased not God, and are contrary to all men : 16. forbidding us to speak to the Gentiles that they might be saved, to fill up their sins alway : for the wrath is come upon them to the uttermost.

Alas ! this was God's ancient Church, where only in all the earth His praises were sung, and His Word preached, where Christ Himself was born and taught. This was the people whom God chose out of all nations to be His. What deadly passions, what jealousy, hatred, and disobedience drew them away from their Saviour ! If our calling too is holy, and our opportunities great, let us all the more beware of sin, lest we too end by falling under God's wrath.

17. But we, brethren, being taken from you for a short time in presence, not in heart, endeavoured the more abundantly to see your face with great desire.

When we are at one in faith and love, bodily separation cannot tear hearts asunder. It may please God that we should not see our dear friends' faces again till the great day, but prayers and communions remind us of each other. What happy greetings there will be in heaven when all this world's partings are over !

18. Wherefore we would have come unto you, even I Paul, once and again ; but Satan hindered us.

How can Satan hinder God's work ? He raises up evil men, or temptations, and rejoices to silence God's Word or make His servants desolate, and yet in the end all his wiles are overruled by grace. God turns the spiritual loss of some to the gain of others. We must not despair when Satan seems to ruin any good work. God has not forgotten it.

19. For what is our hope, or joy, or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ at his coming? 20. For ye are our glory and joy.

Friends whom we have turned to God will be our glory and joy then. Suppose that our love has helped them to feel God's love, our faith and prayers and upright walk have steadied them on the heavenly way; that will indeed be a joy that never passes away. But friends ruined or led astray by us will then prove our everlasting shame and misery.

CHAPTER III.

- 1. Saint Paul testifieth his great love to the Thessalonians, partly by sending Timothy unto them to strengthen and comfort them: partly by rejoicing in their well doing: 10. and partly by praying for them, and desiring a safe coming unto them.*

WHEREFORE when we could no longer forbear, we thought it good to be left at Athens alone; 2. and sent Timotheus, our brother, and minister of God, and our fellowlabourer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you, and to comfort you concerning your faith:

Lord, may our churchgoing tend to establish and comfort us; may we hear on Thy day in Thy house holy words to remain in our memory all the week, and make us more faithful and patient. If these devout, earnest souls at Thessalonica needed words of exhortation, how much more do we in these lukewarm days!

- 3. That no man should be moved by these afflictions: for yourselves know that we are appointed thereunto.*

God has so ordered our life that it has in store some trouble and sorrow; nay, that too much prosperity is unwholesome; it would make us selfish or reckless. His children must part with something of this world's pleasures if they would be true to Him. Christ our Lord and His saints went the way of the Cross, and it is not strange that it should come round to our turn. Let us not start back from it in surprise.

- 4. For verily, when we were with you, we told you before that we should suffer tribulation; even as it came to pass, and ye know.*

What strange persuasions! He did not say, "Be Christians, and

all will prosper with you ;" but he said, " Be Christians, and you will have to bear contempt and loss, and perhaps a cruel death. This world may be rendered very bitter to you, but yet God will be your all-sufficient stay."

5. *For this cause, when I could no longer forbear, I sent to know your faith, lest by some means the tempter have tempted you, and our labour be in vain.*

So faith might fail, and saints fall, and the devil undo an apostle's work. Yes ; if we look at our own frailty there is no abyss of sin or misery into which we might not plunge ourselves ; and yet we lean on a Hand that will not forsake us. Our task should be to join together this fear of ourselves and of the tempter with a calm trust in God's unchanging love.

6. *But now when Timotheus came from you unto us, and brought us good tidings of your faith and charity, and that ye have good remembrance of us always, desiring greatly to see us, as we also to see you : 7. therefore, brethren, we were comforted over you in all our affliction and distress by your faith : 8. for now we live, if ye stand fast in the Lord.*

Here is good news ! Not of our friends growing rich or great, but of their standing fast in the Lord. They still believe in Christ's work, still love Him, still are faithful members of His Church, and attentive to His ministers. Here is good news indeed ! Lord, let our news of dear young friends who have gone out into the world still be this, that they keep to the old faith and love, and fight against the tempter. To hear this is fresh life and comfort to those who love them.

9. *For what thanks can we render to God again for you, for all the joy wherewith we joy for your sakes before our God ;*

What thanks can we render to God for all His mercies ? They overpass our power to reckon, or our tongues to tell of. Yet the gift of love is the best gift of all. Those are rich who have it ; those are poor who have all else and lack it. Joy in others' welfare is a delight which begins on earth, and makes up a great part of the happiness of heaven.

10. *Night and day praying exceedingly that we might see your face, and might perfect that which is lacking in your faith ?*

May there not be something lacking in our faith, some truths not known, some calls not heard, some graces wasted ? Let us study

God's Word, and we shall find many new mysteries we have not fathomed before. Ah, how little, and poor, and weak our faith is ! Lord, increase and strengthen it.

11. Now God himself and our Father, and our Lord Jesus Christ, direct our way unto you.

God and Christ direct our way, if not to meet our dear friends again here, yet to rejoin them in a better place. What matters it if the way be sometimes dark, or hard to find, or beset with foes, so long as our Divine Guide is with us ? God's power and Christ's love can make the rough way smooth, and unite in bliss hearts long parted.

12. And the Lord make you to increase and abound in love one toward another, and toward all men, even as we do toward you :

What can death do against love ? When a ransomed soul has gone on, even amidst infirmities, increasing in love and living in God's Presence, how can disease or corruption destroy it ? This is a sure proof of immortal life, when strength and sense decay, but love burns brighter and brighter to the last. The narrow grave cannot extinguish love.

13. To the end he may establish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints.

What a standard of holiness, what an awful Presence, what a glorious company, what a hope and fear !

“ Our wakened souls prepare
For that tremendous day,
And fill us now with watchful care,
And stir us up to pray.”

CHAPTER IV.

1. He exhorteth them to go on forward in all manner of godliness, 6. to live holily and justly, 9. to love one another, 11. and quietly to follow their own business : 13. and last of all to sorrow moderately for the dead. 15. And unto this last exhortation is annexed a brief description of the resurrection, and second coming of Christ to judgment.

FURTHERMORE then we beseech you, brethren, and exhort you by the Lord Jesus, that as ye have received of us how ye ought to walk and to please God, so ye would abound more and more.

It is dangerous to stand still and suppose that we have done enough. In religious matters our motto should be, "More and more"—more attention in church, more kindness at home, more purity of heart, more patience in trouble. If God of His great mercy has set us in the right way, let us press on day by day towards the heavenly city. Thank God for teaching us how we ought to walk; by His help we will keep advancing in that same way.

2. For ye know what commandments we gave you by the Lord Jesus.

Yes, God be praised, we know well. The Church rests on the apostles' foundation. Christ our Saviour chose them out and guided them to leave us Scriptures, and Creeds, and Divine worship, and the sacred ministry. Thus they still advise and rule us though they have passed away from earth.

3. For this is the will of God, even your sanctification, that ye should abstain from fornication:

This is a rule for all. God wills us to be holy. All uncleanness of thought, and word, and deed is hateful in His holy eyes. We are bound to keep under those evil desires, which, if indulged, make us slaves of sin, and eat out all holy thoughts, and at last harden our hearts utterly. Impurity is as a burning fire, if we do not put it out it will consume all that is good in us.

4. That every one of you should know how to possess his vessel in sanctification and honour; 5. not in the lust of concupiscence, even as the Gentiles which know not God:

You have been taught God's commandments; you are made His child in Baptism; you have learnt how to pray; Christian example has been set you. Thus, dear friend, you cannot live as the heathen do. It would be infinite disgrace for you to give way to lust. Your heart and body are redeemed and sanctified. In the hour of temptation remember that Christ bought you by His Precious Blood.

6. That no man go beyond and defraud his brother in any matter: because that the Lord is the avenger of all such, as we also have forewarned you and testified.

This verse does not refer to cheating, but to seduction. It warns us against stealing the innocence of any soul, against destroying the peace of a family, doing so much harm that we never can undo, to gratify our own passions. Trust God; He will punish; He does not forget to take vengeance on those who have ruined others; His judgments are slow, but they will come at last.

7. For God hath not called us unto uncleanness, but unto holiness.

All is holy about our Christian calling ; God Himself, His Word, His Sacraments, the heaven we are to enter. Christ's Blood washes us from sin, His love claims pure love from us. Those Christians are wretched who forget all this, and live in uncleanness like brute beasts. They tread under foot all the mercies and blessings which saints have valued so highly.

8. He therefore that despiseth, despiseth not man, but God, who hath also given unto us his holy Spirit.

Fools make a mock at sin, but God shews us the profaneness and impudence of it. He tells us that reverence and modesty are dear to Him, and are gifts of His Holy Spirit. Shall we drive away from us so kind a Friend as the Holy Spirit of God ? He cannot bear to dwell in an unclean heart, yet His love and power can make the unclean pure again.

9. But as touching brotherly love ye need not that I write unto you : for ye yourselves are taught of God to love one another.

God taught us this heavenly lesson by coming down on earth in the person of His dear Son, and shewing us a pattern of love. He teaches us more and more of it by putting compassion in our hearts, and needs of brethren in our way. We entreat Him to make us ~~re~~ughters. This lesson will be worth more to us than the knowledge we need to ~~w~~languages and arts. As long as we live in the world we

10. And indeed ye do it .. in all Macedonia : but we beseechrd all the brethren which are more and more ;

Increase in love. The body may bow, and draw to an end, but love should always burn ~~strength~~ decay, and life If by God's great mercy we have been enabled lighter and brighter. hearts, and help them along the road so far, let ~~us~~ to cherish other well-doing. Love is its own reward, whether it may not be weary of in this world or not. ~~with a return~~

11. And that ye study to be quiet, and to do your own business, and to work with your own hands, as we commanded you ; 12. that ye may walk honestly toward them that ~~are~~ without, and that ye may have lack of nothing.

S. Paul shews honour to labour. He rejoices to address working

men, and to bid them rest contented in their condition. He spread before them the gifts and promises of the gospel. He taught them how to unite hard work at their field, or forge, or shop with hymns and prayers, and the hope of Christ's coming. God grant us all to be diligent in our calling, and so pass through life in industrious peace.

13. But I would not have you to be ignorant, brethren, concerning them which are asleep, that ye sorrow not, even as others which have no hope.

Some natural tears are allowed us when we lose our dear ones. We miss their sweet presence and help in life's journey. Without them we seem lonely ; yet we have hope of meeting them again. We know that their Lord and ours can keep them safe. They are asleep for a while, not utterly perished ; they perhaps pray for us and think of us, as we remember them.

14. For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, even so them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with him.

To rise with Jesus we must have gone to sleep in Him, with faith in His mercy, with charity towards His members. Those who die thus will come back again in peace with their Master. Dear friend, do not doubt. You know that Mary's Son rose again ; all the Church, and all believing souls, owe their spiritual life to that triumph over death. Then, if Jesus rose, these poor frail bodies of ours may have the same glorious destiny.

15. For this we say unto you by the word of the Lord, that we which are alive and remain unto the coming of the Lord shall not prevent them which are asleep.

That sleep will be sweet indeed to weary souls who have worked for God while it was day. Where they are now they do not miss this rough, stormy world. Perhaps it seems but a very short while from their death to the last day. They miss nothing worth having. Nay, who can say what happy dreams and bright visions they may not have before their eyes now.

16. For the Lord himself shall descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel, and with the trump of God : and the dead in Christ shall rise first : 17. then we which are alive and remain shall be caught up together with them in the clouds, to meet the Lord in the air : and so shall we ever be with the Lord.

Christ is our only stay. It is the Lord Who will descend. We shall meet Him, we shall be with Him. But for this I should feel what is said of the last day too terrible. The rending tomb, and

rising dead, and awful voice, and strict judgment, are all fearful to me to think of, but I shall rejoice to see my Lord and Friend Who died for me. His dear Presence makes those terrors endurable. He promises me a home with Himself for ever.

18. Wherefore comfort one another with these words.

Yes, dear Lord, I will try to take comfort and give comfort from these thoughts. Death is still grave, and partings sad, but Thy Death and Victory shed a light over the dark valley. I shall lose my friends by death, I shall have to die myself, but I know of a rod and staff on which to lean in that day.

CHAPTER V.

1. He proceedeth in the former description of Christ's coming to judgment, 16. and giveth divers precepts, 23. and so concludeth the epistle.

BUT of the times and the seasons, brethren, ye have no need that I write unto you. 2. For yourselves know perfectly that the day of the Lord so cometh as a thief in the night.

God has hidden from our eyes the exact time of the world's end, and of our own death, which is to each of us the end of this world. If we knew that day was far off we might be reckless; if we knew it was near we might be crushed with fear. Thanks be to God for revealing so many things clearly, and for mercifully hiding others. Let us learn what He has revealed, and be content to wait for the clearing up of the rest till it pleases Him.

3. For when they shall say, Peace and safety; then sudden destruction cometh upon them, as travail upon a woman with child; and they shall not escape.

Let my end not be hopeless, as that here described, but prepared for by repentance, comforted by prayer, enlightened by some rays from above. Let Christ Jesus alone be my peace and safety, and all these warnings turn to my everlasting profit. God is good to warn me. He does not want death and judgment to be my destruction. He tells me of the Cross as a sure means of escape.

4. But ye, brethren, are not in darkness, that that day should overtake you as a thief. 5. Ye are all the children of light, and the children of the day: we are not of the night, nor of darkness.

Children of light see what God is like, what sin is like, the right way to walk in, the snares to fly from. Daylight has beamed on their soul and on their path. Lord, keep me in this bright daylight, take away from my eyes that darkness in which fools walk. They take shadows for realities, and walk into the pit of ruin as if blindfold. With what terror may such persons waken too late and find they have lost themselves for ever !

6. Therefore let us not sleep, as do others ; but let us watch and be sober.

Merciful Lord, cast Thy bright beams of light upon my soul. Let me awake and rise to work, and pray, and study Thy Word. Filthy pleasures of sin must be left behind by one who is journeying towards heaven. Whatever others may do, God has spoken to me, and I dare not disregard His voice.

7. For they that sleep sleep in the night ; and they that be drunken are drunken in the night.

Idleness and sloth are not fit for me ; indeed I find the working day my Lord has given me all too short. A reckless life of pleasure shall not be mine, living as I do amidst deadly temptations, and frail or perishing souls. Heathens might have lived thus ; it was dark night then, but the Sun of Righteousness has risen now.

8. But let us, who are of the day, be sober, putting on the breastplate of faith and love ; and for an helmet, the hope of salvation.

It is war-time, too, as well as daylight. Our enemy never slumbers, and we must beat him, or be slain ourselves. Here is a work to do, a journey to take, a fight to persevere in. Let us follow the example of those dear and brave Christians who have fought the good fight and have overcome, and now are in joy and felicity. They feel now how happy it is for them that they put away thoughts of ease and comfort here below.

9. For God hath not appointed us to wrath, but to obtain salvation by our Lord Jesus Christ,

Let this confidence in God's love to us through Christ remain deep rooted in our hearts. What can hurt us if God is what He is ? We know that He is our Father, and Christ Jesus our Friend and Intercessor, and these thoughts of peace help us in darkest hours.

10. Who died for us, that, whether we wake or sleep, we should live together with him.

I, too, will lay me down in peace and take my rest when the time comes. If I have made Christ my Master, and known the virtue of His Death, I trust that He will still be mine in that unknown land on which I must soon enter. The shadows do not frighten me while He is my Light.

11. Wherefore comfort yourselves together, and edify one another, even as also ye do.

Do not put this verse aside and think it concerns a clergyman but no one else. Have you no friends to comfort or edify, no neighbour whose lonely hours you could brighten, no young people whom you might train in God's way? This verse speaks of lay preaching, and not preaching from the pulpit, but in the surer and gentler way of daily help and advice.

12. And we beseech you, brethren, to know them which labour among you, and are over you in the Lord, and admonish you ; 13. and to esteem them very highly in love for their work's sake. And be at peace among yourselves.

God's ministers have many duties pointed out to them in these verses. Diligence in work, guidance of souls, care for each one of their flock, are all required. But there are words here teaching the people how to behave to them. If clergy have to reproach themselves with falling short of the standard here laid down, yet might they not do better if they met with more of the honour, the love, the sympathy which S. Paul here claims for Christian ministers?

14. Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the feeble-minded, support the weak, be patient toward all men.

Here is a holy priesthood, to be exercised by all. We have still among us unruly tempers, feeble minds, weak, trembling hearts, characters requiring infinite patience. The Church so far is much the same as it was then. Lord, endue us with the Spirit of wisdom, that we may minister to each of Thy children that comfort, reproof, or instruction which they severally need.

15. See that none render evil for evil unto any man ; but ever follow that which is good, both among yourselves, and to all men.

Injustice is an evil ; ay, and so is revenge. Do not add one evil to another. Love what is good in men, or books, or conversation ; cast out evil thoughts by prayer and honest work. Alas ! Eden was happy till evil got in there ; then all was upset.

16. Rejoice evermore.

Lord, let me ever remember Thy wonderful mercies towards me, Thy guidance of my wanderings, Thy light thrown on my darkness, the infinite treasure of Thy blessings bestowed upon me in Christ Jesus. Let the thought of Thy glory and my happiness as Thy child make me glad whatever comes.

17. Pray without ceasing.

A Christian fulfils this command who always feels his dependence on God, who desires to please Him in all his actions, who remembers his accustomed times for prayer as they come. Lord, I must cease praying when I work, or eat, or sleep, or talk, yet I do not quite cease if I bear in mind Thy Presence, and avoid any word or act that is displeasing to Thee.

18. In every thing give thanks : for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus concerning you.

God's providence designs all things for our good, even what seems sharp or bitter, and we must give God glory for all. If we seek His Will in all things we shall be contented and cheerful whether we are sick or well. He knows what condition is best for us. Saints have sweetened the worst troubles by saying, "Glory be to God for all things."

19. Quench not the Spirit. 20. Despise not prophesyings.

God's Spirit lights a flame of love or grace in some heart, endows some one with high gifts and yearnings of devotion. Do not quench this by ridicule or coldness, cherish the reverence and earnestness of the young, beware of discouraging any one who has an offering to make to God.

21. Prove all things ; hold fast that which is good.

This is a good verse to remember when we go into fresh society, when we begin a new line of study or work, when we leave home and friends. Let us carry with us our conscience, our faith, our old love and duty, and make no friends, join in no pleasures which we suspect may be evil. Let go evil thoughts and dreams, hold fast good resolutions and sacred memories.

22. Abstain from all appearance of evil.

Deliver me, Lord, from all evil, and lead me to all good. How can I keep in the right way through this deceitful world unless by Thy special grace? Many let themselves be easily persuaded into sin ; let me have wisdom to see the snare, and courage to avoid it.

23. And the very God of peace sanctify you wholly ; and

I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.

That will be perfect peace and true holiness when the spirit sees God clearly, and understands His ways, when the unruly passions of the soul are stilled, and the body purified from all evil and secure from all harm. But that will not be till Christ comes again. We await in patience that happy day when all these good things will come true. Meanwhile we pray God to begin in us that work which He will one day perfect.

24. Faithful is he that calleth you, who also will do it.

If our salvation rested on ourselves we should despair of it, but it depends on Almighty love and wisdom, which cannot fail. It is God Who produces in us by His grace faith, obedience, and perseverance. What have we to do but reverently adore His goodness, and give up ourselves to fulfil His holy calling?

25. Brethren, pray for us.

If Paul needed his brethren's prayers, much more do we. We can all help each other thus by mutually recommending each others' wants to God. What can we better do when we approach the Holy Table than think over God's Church, and all our brethren and sisters in it, and what they require, and plead the sacrifice of Christ's Death for them?

26. Greet all the brethren with an holy kiss.

Christ the Lord came down to unite Godhead with our frail nature. Shall we think ourselves too grand to condescend to acts of kindness to our brethren, for whom He died? His condescension was infinitely greater than any trouble we can take for those beneath us.

27. I charge you by the Lord that this epistle be read unto all the holy brethren.

This was his first letter that remains to us. No doubt it brought peace and strength to the hearts of his converts. They rejoiced to turn it over and over, and hear it read aloud. What a blessing it is when God bestows upon any one of us the power to teach or comfort his brethren! Lord, increase this gift among us, and make us who read or listen profit by holy words.

28. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you. Amen.

Grace is a little word, but it sounds like music to a Christian's ear. It contains the thought of Divine power and love, and both put at our disposal freely by our best Friend.

*THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL
THE APOSTLE TO THE
THESSALONIANS.*

CHAPTER I.

1. Saint Paul certifieth them of the good opinion which he had of their faith, love, and patience: ii. and therewithal useth divers reasons for the comforting of them in persecution, whereof the chiefeſt is taken from the righteous judgment of God.

PAUL, and Silvanus, and Timotheus, unto the church of the Thessalonians in God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ: 2. grace unto you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Church of the Thessalonians, to whom this blessing was sent, meant those in Thessalonica who had been adopted as God's children, sanctified by Holy Baptism, linked together by common faith and hope. There was no outward difference between them and the other dwellers in the city; but how great was the inward difference! what a treasure and hope these had of which their fellow-citizens knew nothing!

3. *We are bound to thank God always for you, brethren, as it is meet, because that your faith groweth exceedingly, and the charity of every one of you all toward each other aboundeth;*

These are possessions of the Church that are worth thanking God for, more than for riches or grand buildings or crowded services or a lofty position amongst men. None of all those make the true glory of the Church, only faith and love. Lord, give us these two great treasures, faith in the Unseen that grows and deepens as we live on, and abundant love that meets and helps the suffering.

4. *So that we ourselves glory in you in the churches of God*

for your patience and faith in all your persecutions and tribulations that ye endure :

Did it ever seem strange to them that on becoming Christians their lot was so much harder? Did the consolations of grace make up to them for this world's ill-usage? Yes, God strengthened their weakness; they were but young Christians, and yet they grew into saints and martyrs very soon. God had great designs for them. Who knows which of us might

“By His Electing grace
Amongst His martyrs find our glorious place”?

5. Which is a manifest token of the righteous judgment of God, that ye may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which ye also suffer :

“If they do these things in the green tree, what shall be done in the dry?” So said the Chief of sufferers; and so it has been ever since with reflective minds who observe the great trials God sends on the good, and the ease and triumph in which His enemies often live. Doubtless there is a God that judgeth the earth; those whom He purifies by suffering now must one day have rest; those who defy Him, and live for their own pleasures, must be storing up wrath for themselves. God shews a part of His judgments, but reserves much more.

6. Seeing it is a righteous thing with God to recompense tribulation to them that trouble you ;

“Righteous art Thou, O Lord, and true is Thy judgment.” Our Lord takes as done to Himself insult or wrong done to His little ones. If He is just, then cruelty and unrighteousness will find a punishment. Earthly judges only deal out justice to some crimes, and that imperfectly, but they remind us of the unalterable sentence which shall one day go forth against all evil.

7. And to you who are troubled rest with us, when the Lord Jesus shall be revealed from heaven with his mighty angels, 8. in flaming fire taking vengeance on them that know not God, and that obey not the gospel of our Lord Jesus Christ :

Rest for some, vengeance for others. So says God's Word, and those must be very wise who know more than it does, or very reckless who, knowing its warnings, despise them. Choose the safe way of believing in God, and obeying Christ's gospel, and then you will be secure in the day of wrath, and will enjoy peace with all God's saints from the beginning of the world.

9. Who shall be punished with everlasting destruction from the presence of the Lord, and from the glory of his power ;

"Recordare, Jesu pie." In that awful day, Lord, remember me; forget not Thy poor creature whom Thou hast made and redeemed. Let me lose much in this life, if it so please God, so long as I do not lose His eternal mercy. "If He is my light and salvation, whom then shall I fear? if He is the strength of my life, of whom then shall I be afraid?"

10. When he shall come to be glorified in his saints, and to be admired in all them that believe (because our testimony among you was believed) in that day.

As Christ shared His sufferings with His people, so He will share His glory. While on earth they may have been despised and afflicted, but in the life to come they will enjoy God's Presence for ever. Faith is the link between those two conditions. They believed in God and Christ while they were in low estate, and that faith and trust still lasts, and will last for ever. They are the same, their faith and their God are the same, though all else is changed with them.

11. Wherefore also we pray always for you, that our God would count you worthy of this calling, and fulfil all the good pleasure of his goodness, and the work of faith with power:

Thanks for good prayers. God grant us a share in them. When we are pressed hard by temptation, or faint with trouble, let us remember that there are dear souls who pray for us, that the Church's sacrifice is offered for all estates of men, and that we have our share in its virtue. We need, both in life and death, the help of prayers, and as our own prayers are so weak and feeble, God grants us the help of better prayers than ours, which no doubt the saints are still making for us.

12. That the name of our Lord Jesus Christ may be glorified in you, and ye in him, according to the grace of our God and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Let Christ be glorified by my life and my death. His grace can do what my frailty cannot. Christ the Lord will at the last day receive glory from me if I am faithful, and I also shall receive glory from Him Who strengthens my weak nature to persevere.

CHAPTER II.

1. He willeth them to continue stedfast in the truth received, 3. sheweth that there shall be a departure from the faith, 9. and a discovery of antichrist, before the day of the Lord come. 15. And thereupon repeateth his former exhortation, and prayeth for them.

NOW we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by our gathering together unto him, 2. that ye be not soon shaken in mind, or be troubled, neither by spirit, nor by word, nor by letter as from us, as that the day of Christ is at hand.

Even in the apostolic Church there were lying spirits, false teachers, even forged Scriptures. Shall we marvel if there are stumbling-blocks in the Church of our own day? What deceivers said then was that the Day of Judgment was already beginning, that there was no time for repentance, for teaching, for good works; men must sit and fold their hands, and listen for the archangel's trump. What deceivers say now is that the judgment is never coming, and that men may live as they please without fear. Lord, help us to wait Thine appointed time, but never lose our faith in Thy return.

3. Let no man deceive you by any means: for that day shall not come, except there come a falling away first, and that man of sin be revealed, the son of perdition;

Alas! it is not easy to keep on the Lord's side as things are now, but how should we fare if all around us believers fell away, and wickedness reigned triumphant? Our own weakness leads us to pray God that we may be kept from such days as those. Let us beware of giving way to any known sin. This slip might be the beginning of an utter falling away from God. Each of us carries in his own heart inclinations to evil which, if not resisted, might make him a monster of wickedness.

4. Who opposeth and exalteth himself above all that is called God, or that is worshipped; so that he as God sitteth in the temple of God, shewing himself that he is God.

Does this dreadful picture belong to some one bad man yet to come who shall persuade men to adore him as God, or does it mean the spirit of profanity and blasphemy that sets itself against God, and denies His Word? If this latter is the true sense, we see Antichrist working all around us now, reviling Holy Scriptures, making a mock of sin, leading away Christians to be blasphemers. Lord,

keep us true and humble worshippers at Thy holy altar, then we shall never put any one else into Thy place in our hearts.

5. Remember ye not, that, when I was yet with you, I told you these things ?

The Christian religion was taught then at first by word of mouth, and afterwards put into writing. God first founded the Church, in which believers were instructed by the apostles what to believe and do, and then had the Scriptures written on purpose to hand down all these teachings faithfully to generations to come. We have not heard S. Paul speak, but we can learn and live by what he wrote.

6. And now ye know what withholdeth that he might be revealed in his time. 7. For the mystery of iniquity doth already work : only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way.

What lets or keeps back the full development of wickedness? Much —human law and police, good books and examples, church and school and means of grace, God's pity for our weak, doubting hearts—all these keep under the great tide of wickedness which otherwise would burst all bounds and overwhelm the world. Lord, we pray Thee look upon our enemies and make their chariot-wheels drive heavily ; let them not overtake and ruin Thy children in the dangerous passage of this world. Thou hast long hindered sin ; hinder it still in us and about us.

8. And then shall that Wicked be revealed, whom the Lord shall consume with the spirit of his mouth, and shall destroy with the brightness of his coming :

Jesus is hidden in faithful hearts, Antichrist in sinful ones. The last day will display both one and the other in full light. Let God's grace now consume and destroy all in us that belongs to Antichrist, so that the Judgment fire may find in us nothing to be destroyed. Wickedness looks mighty and attractive now, but it will wither up to nothing in Christ's Presence.

9. Even him, whose coming is after the working of Satan with all power and signs and lying wonders, 10. and with all deceivableness of unrighteousness in them that perish ; because they received not the love of the truth, that they might be saved.

How can we defend ourselves from such deceptions as these? May we not, too, chance to be led away by the powers of evil? No ; love the truth, and it will keep you safe. Christ's gospel in your hands, His faith in your mouth, upright honesty in your doings, will keep

you from those snares into which many wise and clever and learned men may fall. Be not tempted by lying wonders, but keep to the old Catholic faith which has been dear to the saints. They loved the truth, and so lived by it.

11. And for this cause God shall send them strong delusion, that they should believe a lie : 12. that they all might be damned who believed not the truth, but had pleasure in unrighteousness.

This is a frightful punishment, to be handed over to falsehood, and be unable to see the truth. God keep me from taking pleasure in wickedness, lest I too blind my eyes and lose the true light for ever. Love truth, do right, be humble and pure, and God's mercy will be to you instead of eyes. He will guide you through this world's dark ways into the light everlasting. Apart from Him no cleverness or learning or gifts of this world can illumine the inward sight.

13. But we are bound to give thanks always to God for you, brethren beloved of the Lord, because God hath from the beginning chosen you to salvation through sanctification of the Spirit and belief of the truth :

The delusion of Antichrist will not hurt us if our minds are sanctified from evil by God's Holy Spirit, and we believe firmly in the truth of His gospel. All this is of His free choice and infinite mercy to us, whom He has loved for Christ's sake. No, I do not pretend to be wiser than so many who scoff, cleverer than so many who stumble at the hard places of Scripture. I have no wisdom of my own to rely on ; but I cling to God's love, and will let nothing rob me of that.

14. Whereunto he called you by our gospel, to the obtaining of the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Heaven is not offered as a chance gift to idlers, but put before brave warriors as a reward for fighting well ; and it means being with Christ, sharing in what He has. We know Who Christ is, and whither He has gone. His faithful friends are invited to join Him there, and never leave Him more.

15. Therefore, brethren, stand fast, and hold the traditions which ye have been taught, whether by word, or our epistle.

Let us stand fast in the faith and keep to what the apostles taught ; their traditions have come to us both in their writings, and in the creed which bears their name, and in the constant faith and practice of the Church. God has set us in the same Church which the apostles founded, and which has continued on earth to this day.

It is for us to live as Christians ought to live, that the saints may not be ashamed to own us for brethren.

16. Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, 17. comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work.

What troubles can quench God's consolation, what fears destroy a good hope of finding mercy with Him? This world has its own comforts and prospects, but they soon fade away when trouble comes, while God's grace fills our hearts with a sweetness which nothing can destroy, and lightens our dark journey with gleams from the heavenly gates. Lord, give us at least good words and good works; let all thy comforts and promises make us more able to strive against sin.

CHAPTER III.

1. He craveth their prayers for himself, 3. testifieth what confidence he hath in them, 5. maketh request to God in their behalf, 6. giveth them divers precepts, especially to shun idleness, and ill company, 16. and last of all concludeth with prayer and salutation.

FINALLY, brethren, pray for us, that the word of the Lord may have free course, and be glorified, even as it is with you:

To pray thus with sincerity we must first have let God's Word enter into our own hearts and reign there. How can sin's slaves feel joy at the progress of the gospel, or grief for its hindrances? Here is the source of our coldness about missions, that we have not felt the preciousness of grace to our own souls. We stand outside and look on at the fight like spectators who care little.

2. And that we may be delivered from unreasonable and wicked men: for all men have not faith.

This is the captain appealing to his soldiers to follow and succour him. He goes first into the enemy's ranks, and they rush to share his danger and save him or die with him. Prayers are the weapons which Christians use; they feel that the hosts of good and evil are engaged for life and death, and so earnestly beseech God that His champions may win. Lord, give us strength to see and choose Thy side, and at last share in Thy triumph.

3. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil.

God will not desert those who trust in Him. As He first gave us faith, so He will quicken and sustain it through all trials. The deep conviction of our own frailty leads us to rely on One Who is almighty. If we had not Him to help us, what would become of us in the presence of temptation?

4. And we have confidence in the Lord touching you, that ye both do and will do the things which we command you.

As Catholic Christians we still enjoy communion with the holy apostles; their writings are read, their traditions are kept, the psalms and prayers and sacraments they used are used still by us. We teach no new faith but that which came through their ministry from the mouth of Christ Himself.

5. And the Lord direct your hearts into the love of God, and into the patient waiting for Christ.

Direct us, O Lord, amidst the many dangers that beset our way. Let love and patience never fail us, whatever be our share of this world's possessions; and at last, when the changes and chances of this life are over, let Thy loving Spirit lead us forth into a land of righteousness.

6. Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us. 7. For yourselves know how ye ought to follow us: for we behaved not ourselves disorderly among you; 8. neither did we eat any man's bread for nought; but wrought with labour and travail night and day, that we might not be chargeable to any of you: 9. not because we have not power, but to make ourselves an ensample unto you to follow us.

God has been pleased to lay on fallen man the duty of hard work, not only as a punishment, but as a remedy. It is the divinely appointed medicine which preserves us from many temptations, and the saints viewed it not only as a medicine, but as an honour. They delighted to put their own hands to work, and share the condition of labourers or artisans. They learned thus how to feel with them, and so lead them to Christ. How many lives amongst ourselves the holy apostle would think idle and disorderly! he would blame us that we let slip our short time in so much ease, so many dreams and follies. His example bids us work hard in our several callings.

10. *For even when we were with you, this we commanded you, that if any would not work, neither should he eat.*

As God's creatures, redeemed by His grace, we hold our life, and all we have, on His conditions. If we do not work for Him according to our place and opportunities, we are but intruders who have no business in His creation or His Church. Idleness enfeebles our mind as well as our body, and deprives us of God's grace, if not of our earthly bread. Let the rich ponder over this verse, and learn that it has a meaning for them no less than for their poorer brethren.

11. *For we hear that there are some which walk among you disorderly, working not at all, but are busybodies. 12. Now them that are such we command and exhort by our Lord Jesus Christ, that with quietness they work, and eat their own bread.*

Give us, O Lord, our daily bread, strength to work for it, grace to use it rightly, a liberal heart to share it with our brethren. Whether our work is of the mind or the body, it is but weariness and pain without the refreshment of Thy grace. When our working day here is over, let us be ready for the summons to do our Father's Will elsewhere.

13. *But ye, brethren, be not weary in well doing.*

Some good actions may be the fruit of mere fancy, or pride, or even selfishness, but then they do not go on for long. Only that well-doing which comes of God's Holy Spirit continues, whether seen or unseen, whether in prosperity or adversity. How beautiful a thing is such a consistent life, which goes on from youth to age in God's service !

14. *And if any man obey not our word by this epistle, note that man, and have no company with him, that he may be ashamed. 15. Yet count him not as an enemy, but admonish him as a brother.*

How difficult it is to blame or punish wisely ! We are taught to hate the sin, and yet love the sinner, to stand apart and reject him, and yet to tenderly admonish him. Perhaps the true secret of doing good to those who have gone wrong is to love them and pray for them, and thus God may open a way for us to speak to their conscience with profit. Without love no correction or advice is of any use.

16. *Now the Lord of peace himself give you peace always by all means. The Lord be with you all.*

This peace is not merely an easy and quiet life, free from care or

danger, it means more than that ; it is peace with God, with our neighbours, with our own heart ; peace, whether in joy or sorrow, peace at home or abroad, in life or death, peace wrought by Christ's Death, and brought home to us by His Spirit.

17. *The salutation of Paul with mine own hand, which is the token in every epistle : so I write.* 18. *The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.*

We see in these two verses true tokens of S. Paul's mind, as his friends knew his handwriting when they came to them. He is the prophet of God's grace, tells us Who has procured it with His Blood, where it is applied to us, how we need it in all our works. He describes the triumphs, the enemies, the comforts of grace. No doubt he still prays God to pour it largely upon us.

THE FIRST EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO TIMOTHY.

CHAPTER I.

1. Timothy is put in mind of the charge which was given unto him by Paul at his going to Macedonia. 5. Of the right use and end of the law. 11. Of Saint Paul's calling to be an apostle, 20. and of Hymenaeus and Alexander.

PAUL, *an apostle of Jesus Christ by the commandment of God our Saviour, and Lord Jesus Christ, which is our hope;*

God is our Saviour, because all our blessedness springs from His love. He is the source of all our comforts and mercies. And Christ is our Hope, because we look to Him for pardon, grace, and glory. What good can we hope for unless we are one with Him? His Cross gives us hope of forgiveness, His Divine words and life hope of well-doing. Heaven will be the sight of His countenance. Those whom God has called to be the messengers of this salvation and hope to their brethren have indeed a high office. Their hearts should be raised towards heaven by their Divine calling.

2. *Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God our Father and Jesus Christ our Lord.*

Not only grace and peace, but mercy too. God and Christ impart grace and peace to us, but yet we need mercy too. Those who represent Christ, and plead His cause with men, have great need of mercy; their frailty requires it. They can best tell of mercy when they have themselves experienced it. Observe how poor, how cold, how empty, would any one's ministry be who had had no experience of these three Divine gifts. How could he speak of what he knew not?

3. As I besought thee to abide still at Ephesus, when I went into Macedonia, that thou mightest charge some that they teach no other doctrine, 4. neither give heed to fables and endless genealogies, which minister questions, rather than godly edifying which is in faith : so do.

Even in apostolic days false doctrines were creeping in, divisions arose, Christian teachers taught their own fancies instead of the Catholic faith. Such thoughts bid us not be surprised at corruptions or errors in our own day. When Satan could not hinder the gospel by stirring up persecutions, he sowed seeds of error and strife, turned away Christians from the great truths of the gospel to controversies without end, urged them to alter the old ways. O Lord, let us remain stedfast in Thy truth, study Thy Holy Word, abide in Thy Holy Church. Apart from this there is no sure guide.

5. Now the end of the commandment is charity out of a pure heart, and of a good conscience, and of faith unfeigned :

Here is a summary of practical religion. It is the same as love or charity ; it requires a heart purified by Christ's Blood, a conscience enlightened by His teaching, a firm trust in Him alone for salvation. This is the meaning of all Scripture, the lesson which all the saints leave us.

6. From which some having swerved have turned aside unto vain jangling ;

They missed the true aim of life, and satisfied their minds with vain talk and empty dreams instead. How S. Paul abhorred talkers who were not doers ; men who had much discourse ready on religious subjects, but lacked love and earnestness ! It was this evil which, in his old age, he saw beginning to spread amongst Christians.

7. Desiring to be teachers of the law ; understanding neither what they say, nor whereof they affirm.

We can only understand the law rightly by the light of the gospel. Now we see its place in God's plan ; now we see those truths unveiled of which it had the shadow ; now we see how the Lord Jesus fulfilled it. Those who put aside Christ and His work lost the true meaning of the law, and busied themselves in endless details, endless strifes and fables. Give us, Lord, teachable hearts, that we may be able to learn of Thee, and so teach others. Our own ignorance constrains us to come to Thee for light.

8. But we know that the law is good, if a man use it lawfully ;

The Ten Commandments are good in representing God's holy law written in our conscience, and exemplified to us by Christ and His saints. They are a rule, but cannot give us strength to keep the rule ; a guide, but have no grace with them ; a herald of judgment, not a message of pardon. There is light there, but no love. If we use the law to know our own frailty, and come to Jesus Christ for help, then we make a good use of it.

9. *Knowing this, that the law is not made for a righteous man, but for the lawless and disobedient, for the ungodly and for sinners, for unholy and profane, for murderers of fathers and murderers of mothers, for manslayers, 10. for whoremongers, for them that defile themselves with mankind, for menstealers, for liars, for perjured persons, and if there be any other thing that is contrary to sound doctrine ;*

Sound doctrine means purity of life, means obedience of heart and will to God's holy law. All religious teaching that despises this is but sickly dreaming, in S. Paul's judgment. He desired Christians to be standards of holy living in an ungodly world. The purpose of Christ in redeeming them was to make them zealous of good works. They had come out of darkness now, and must live as God's children.

11. *According to the glorious gospel of the blessed God, which was committed to my trust.*

God is blessed, and would have us blessed also by knowing Him. The gospel reveals His glory to men. Think what a trust is committed to the hands of apostles and Christian pastors : they have to impart something of God's blessedness and glory to His creatures. What true tongues and faithful hearts are needed for this great task !

12. *And I thank Christ Jesus our Lord, who hath enabled me, for that he counted me faithful, putting me into the ministry ;*

Lord, enable us for our work. What strength have we but of Thee ? What faithfulness wilt Thou find in us except Thou first bestow it ? If I exercise the sacred ministry, what a trust has been committed to me ! My frailty needs to be daily quickened and upheld by Divine grace.

13. *Who was before a blasphemer, and a persecutor, and injurious : but I obtained mercy, because I did it ignorantly in unbelief.*

The remembrance of his sins seemed so bitter, the Divine forgive-

ness so wonderful. He had used blasphemous words against Christ, had persecuted His people, had used insult and outrage against the gospel, and lo, he was now a sharer in God's grace, and its herald to other men ! Remember, if we who are Christians deliberately cast away God's service and choose our own evil passions for masters, or if, after knowing Christ, we revile and reject Him, our sin is greater than the apostle's, and our chance of repentance much less.

14. And the grace of our Lord was exceeding abundant with faith and love which is in Christ Jesus.

God's mercy was much greater than my wretchedness. Faith and love have overcome all my unbelief and coldness. O happy experience ! Lord, make it ours. May we daily grow in these graces. May we day by day feel more the grievousness of our sins, and still rest more securely on Thy pardoning mercy.

15. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief.

This is a Christian maxim, a summary of the gospel, a sure resting-place for troubled hearts. The Son of God came into the world to save sinners. Such was His Divine plan. In the light of this great truth all the world's miseries find comfort, all its darkness receives a ray of Divine light. Sinners are indeed wretched, sin is hateful, its end frightful ; but the dear Son of God has come to illumine all this dark scene, and make it a stepping-stone to everlasting joy.

16. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all longsuffering, for a pattern to them which should hereafter believe on him to life everlasting.

What extreme forbearance we should show, if God has been so forbearing with us ! My sins and follies have not yet worn out Divine mercy ; should I then be hard on other sinners whose shortcomings towards me are much less than my own offences against God ? Nay, let me take Christ's long-suffering as my pattern ; let no ingratitude wear out my patience. Thanks to God for having had so much patience with me.

17. Now unto the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only wise God, be honour and glory for ever and ever. Amen.

O Lord, holy Father, almighty, everlasting God, we give thanks to Thee with heart and lips. It is meet and right and our bounden duty. This is our God, and He will save us. The shortness of our

life, our frailty, our folly, make us cling to His eternal, unchanging life as our only stay. How blank and woful would be our condition if we lived here in the world without God !

18. This charge I commit unto thee, son Timothy, according to the prophecies which went before on thee, that thou by them mightest war a good warfare;

Deep hopes and earnest prayers had accompanied Timothy's first entrance on the sacred ministry. It was for him now to fulfil them. He must remember that his business is war ; the world and Satan are his enemies. The Church is militant ; losses, wounds, even defeats abound. What business has a soldier with a slothful, easy, inglorious life ?

19. Holding faith, and a good conscience; which some having put away concerning faith have made shipwreck :

There are rocks in our course, currents that lead us astray, contrary winds that blow against us. Many fair vessels that have set out cheerfully from shore never reached their haven. When a young Christian throws away his prayers, forgets his home, follows after Satan's ways, there is a woful wreck of cherished hopes and gifts. Keep me, Lord, as long as I live here, in Thy true faith, and free from deadly sin. Whatever else comes upon me, let me at least not lose Thee.

20. Of whom is Hymenæus and Alexander; whom I have delivered unto Satan, that they may learn not to blaspheme.

Ah, they were delivered to Satan ; the Church knew them no more ; they were publicly condemned and cast out from Christian communion ; their portion was trouble and shame. Yet S. Paul trusted that this might work repentance in them. He declared that they were Satan's prey, in order that the very vexations and chains of the evil one might render them impatient of sin and desirous to live to God again. Let all the trials that Satan raises be for our profit ; thus he becomes God's minister to us.

CHAPTER II.

1. That it is meet to pray and give thanks for all men, and the reason why.
9. How women should be attired.
12. They are not permitted to teach.
15. They shall be saved, notwithstanding the testimonies of God's wrath, in childbirth, if they continue in faith.

I EXHORT therefore, that, first of all, supplications, prayers, intercessions, and giving of thanks, be made for all men ;

These four parts of Divine worship still go on in Christ's Church. We represent our needs and frailties (that is supplication) when we repeat the general Confession or the Litany, or ask God to have mercy upon us, and incline our hearts to keep His law. Then come the Collects, which are the Church's daily prayers. Next follow intercessions for the whole state of Christ's Church, when we have offered the bread and wine upon God's altar. Last of all comes the great giving of thanks to God for all His mercies, when we hear the bidding to lift up our hearts, and begin to remember Christ's Death and all it wrought for us.

2. For kings, and for all that are in authority ; that we may lead a quiet and peaceable life in all godliness and honesty.

This is why Christians remember the Queen and all who are put in authority under her, the Parliament and its proceedings. They desire peaceful times, opportunity to serve God, the chance of an upright, honest life open to all. O Lord, give peace in our time, if it be Thy gracious Will. In war, cruelty and lust and plunder run wild, churches are profaned, God's Word is silenced. No doubt, war itself has a part in the designs of Providence, but we fear such a terrible scourge, and entreat God for quiet days.

3. For this is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour ; 4. who will have all men to be saved, and to come unto the knowledge of the truth.

If God desires it we should desire it too. Our prayers, our offerings, our teaching and example, should all go towards spreading the knowledge of salvation as widely as possible. What misery it would be for us to go against God's Will and hinder the salvation of any ! What a great mystery it is that God would have all men to be saved, and yet has made the accomplishment of His gracious purpose dependent on our doing our duty ! It is for us, by earnest prayer and hearty efforts, to bring home Divine grace to burdened hearts.

5. For there is one God, and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus ;

I believe in one God the Father Almighty, Maker of heaven and earth, and in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only-begotten Son of God, Who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary. As my own heart and the study of God's works lead me to believe in one God distinct from His creatures, so the gospel teaches me of one Christ, in Whom Godhead and manhood are joined together.

6. Who gave himself a ransom for all, to be testified in due time.

Christ's Death was the ransom for mankind. His Blood opened our prison doors, restored us to peace and life and hope again. The Church of God daily sets forth this ransom and applies it to men's souls. Only Christ could pay this price, and He measured it out on the Cross.

" Upon its arms, like balance true,
He weighed the price for sinners due."

7. Whereunto I am ordained a preacher, and an apostle, (I speak the truth in Christ, and lie not;) a teacher of the Gentiles in faith and verity.

Christian preaching also is a setting forth of Christ's Death in its saving power. Ministers have the good tidings of grace committed to them to spread abroad amongst mankind. They receive a commission by prayer and laying on of hands. They go not of their own sending or in their own strength, but because they are sent and strengthened from on high.

8. I will therefore that men pray every where, lifting up holy hands, without wrath and doubting.

Not in Jerusalem only, but in all the earth God's House can be built, and acceptable worship offered to Him. His people may assemble anywhere, and their prayers will ascend to His Throne. We must so live as to be able to pray. Our hands must be honest, our hearts at peace, our faith sincere. How it spoils our prayers when we have been quarrelling or oppressing any one! Then we feel unable to lift up our hands or hearts towards God. His great mercy bestows on us Sundays, festivals, opportunities of grace, to remind us of our duty.

9. In like manner also, that women adorn themselves in modest apparel, with shamefacedness and sobriety; not with broided hair, or gold, or pearls, or costly array;

Even in apostolic times some women came to church with much display and many ornaments. They forgot what behaviour and appearance are befitting when we meet to acknowledge our sins, to entreat God's mercy, to hear about death and eternity. Is it not foolish for us to turn Divine service into an occasion for vanity, and so spoil all the holy lessons we might otherwise learn? In God's sight true beauty and grace are inward only. He takes no notice of figure or apparel, but observes the heart.

10. But (which becometh women professing godliness) with good works.

There are many good works which God has assigned to women; the care of children, of the sick, of the aged; they have to guide the

house and preserve peace and order there. The love, duty, and gratitude of their family and their neighbours is an ornament which renders them beautiful. God and angels, and men too, appreciate such an adornment as this.

11. Let the woman learn in silence with all subjection. 12. But I suffer not a woman to teach, nor to usurp authority over the man, but to be in silence.

Modesty lies not merely in dress, but in conversation and behaviour. When God appointed women their peculiar work, He bade them not take on themselves what belongs to men. Their strength lies in submission, their influence is through love and patience. If women throw down their own duties and become loud, busy, and stirring in the world, they are in danger of losing their most precious gifts.

13. For Adam was first formed, then Eve. 14. And Adam was not deceived, but the woman being deceived was in the transgression.

In the first account of man and woman that we have, man appears as set to rule and guide, and when he gives up his place and follows woman's persuasion he is led astray. Eden supplies us with a picture first of man ruling, next of woman misleading. Ah, dear Lord, keep away the tempter from us; let no strife, no deceit, no evil desires, plant misery in our domestic peace. How soon all the first simple innocence and brightness of the world disappeared!

15. Notwithstanding she shall be saved in childbearing, if they continue in faith and charity and holiness with sobriety.

Woman has her own share of duty and of grace, though it is different from that which man has. Above all, she has to bear and to educate children; they are committed to her care. She may excel, too, in inward graces; her faith, her love, her purity, are a rebuke to man, who is often so far behind her.

CHAPTER III.

2. How bishops, and deacons, and their wives should be qualified, 14. and to what end Saint Paul wrote to Timothy of these things. 15. Of the church, and the blessed truth therein taught and professed.

THIS is a true saying, *If a man desire the office of a bishop, he desireth a good work.*

The word Bishop here includes the Priesthood too, for as yet the names were not distinguished. Christ's ministers were called either Bishops or Presbyters, and S. Timothy, who had to ordain and govern them, was as yet distinguished by no special title, though his office resembled that of a Bishop amongst us. But whatever degree in the sacred ministry they exercised, it was an honourable work, had to deal with holy things, to dispense blessing, to bring comfort. Woe to us if we profane or despise such a holy calling !

2. A bishop then must be blameless, the husband of one wife, vigilant, sober, of good behaviour, given to hospitality, apt to teach;

This assemblage of good qualities required for ministers is a rebuke to many of us who are already ordained. How far from blameless we are, how easily our purity is stained, how often we may be found off our guard, self-indulgent, stingy, slothful ! This verse sketches out an upright, holy, tender, and gentle character, such as would win the respect and love of all men. Alas ! we are conscious how far we come short of it.

3. Not given to wine, no striker, not greedy of filthy lucre ; but patient, not a brawler, not covetous ;

Even ministers are flesh and blood, are exposed to temptations of drunkenness, of passion, of revenge, of greed. Yes, indeed, we know it by our own experience. Priest and people too must remember that they are in an enemy's country ; how great need they alike have to watch over their words, to avoid occasions of sin ! Those who think themselves too far advanced to be in danger may easily fall.

4. One that ruleth well his own house, having his children in subjection with all gravity ; 5. (for if a man know not how to rule his own house, how shall he take care of the church of God ?)

God's Church is like a family ; pastors should care for their people as for their own children, should feel for their sorrows, watch over their conduct, rejoice in their good works, as a good father would feel about his children. They themselves in their own families should set an example of the regularity, forbearance, devotion, that they would desire to see established in other households.

6. Not a novice, lest being lifted up with pride he fall into the condemnation of the devil. 7. Moreover he must have a good report of them which are without ; lest he fall into reproach and the snare of the devil.

"The sins of teachers are teachers of sin." Satan gets a great advantage when he seduces the clergy into sinful ways. This is the real source of much of the unbelief and carelessness which prevails among Christians; they see those who are set over them neglecting their sacred duties, living careless or godless lives, and they are led thus to be lax in their own lives, and doubtful in their own faith. Priests who fall drag others down with them, as Satan himself did.

8. Likewise must the deacons be grave, not double tongued, not given to much wine, not greedy of filthy lucre;

How would holy words suit with impure lips, or the declaration of heavenly mysteries with a false tongue, or frequent communions with indulgence in wine, or the management of church alms with a covetous heart? When those who assist at God's altar visit the poor in sickness, teach the children about God, are themselves an offence, they pull down more than they build up.

9. Holding the mystery of the faith in a pure conscience.

If I allow my conscience to be defiled by deadly sin, I shall soon lose my hold on the doctrines of the gospel. God manifests His truth only to the pure in heart. Whatever sin I indulge in, I lose so much of Divine light; I endanger my faith as well as my peace, I need to keep my conscience pure, that I may readily discern God's truth, and manifest it to my brethren.

10. And let these also first be proved; then let them use the office of a deacon, being found blameless.

Why do we seek to enter the ministry? Is it merely to lead an easy life, or enjoy a good position, or have opportunities of learning? if such is all our intention, there is no call of God here. Let all those who seek ordination prove their calling first, consider the lofty professions they will have to make, the kind of work they will have to do, and turn aside from it rather than enter it as a mere business.

11. Even so must their wives be grave, not slanderers, sober, faithful in all things.

Women have their own work to do for God. They may not indeed preach in the church or dispense Sacraments, but there are innumerable works of mercy and ministries towards the sick, the fallen, the children, which God has assigned to them. Many women have found greater treasures in such duties than all the world's promises could offer.

12. Let the deacons be the husbands of one wife, ruling their

children and their own houses well. 13. For they that have used the office of a deacon well purchase to themselves a good degree, and great boldness in the faith which is in Christ Jesus.

God trains us for His service by degrees. He intrusts us with the care of a child, a class, one or two sick or afflicted souls, with a little teaching, a little learning, that so we may become fit for greater works. Let our wisdom be to discern His Will for us, and fulfil it heartily. The least bit of work to be done for Him is worth doing well. In His great household there is room for every kind of service ; in His great army there are soldiers of all ranks and weapons. May we be found amongst faithful servants and true soldiers !

14. These things write I unto thee, hoping to come unto thee shortly : 15. but if I tarry long, that thou mayest know how thou oughtest to behave thyself in the house of God, which is the church of the living God, the pillar and ground of the truth.

God's Church is not a building, but a society in which His truth is taught, His Sacraments administered, His members trained up. This has been the home of believers in every age. Here they have found rest from labours, shelter from storms. What a great trust it is to have been called to minister in this holy society, to take on our lips the prayers and praises of the saints, to transmit to others the same doctrines and promises which we have received !

16. And without controversy great is the mystery of godliness : God was manifest in the flesh, justified in the Spirit, seen of angels, preached unto the Gentiles, believed on in the world, received up into glory.

This is the truth which God's Church preserves and confesses—the story of the Incarnation. In Christ Jesus the unseen God became visible, joined Himself to our human history and dwelling-place, fulfilled the duties of life here below, taught, suffered, and overcame. All those deep truths that nature and the heart of man half revealed, are now set forth in Christ so that all men may lay hold on them. This Divine mystery joins heaven and earth, glorifies our frail nature, opens lofty thoughts to the simple.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He foretelleth that in the latter times there shall be a departure from the faith. 6. And to the end that Timothy might not fail in doing his duty, he furnisheth him with divers precepts belonging thereto.

NOW the Spirit speaketh expressly, that in the latter times some shall depart from the faith, giving heed to seducing spirits, and doctrines of devils;

God in His wisdom allows men to depart from the true faith, nay, foretells that they will do so; and this serves to try us, to deepen our belief, to give us a firmer hold on truth. We might have thought that when men had once received Divine truth, got to live by it and love it, there was no more danger for them; but we see here that we have not yet done with temptation. Lord, make us give heed to holy teaching, to angels' messages, to the leading of Thy grace, so that our ears may be closed against error.

2. Speaking lies in hypocrisy; having their conscience seared with a hot iron; 3. forbidding to marry, and commanding to abstain from meats, which God hath created to be received with thanksgiving of them which believe and know the truth.

What is more sacred than the love of husband and wife? what more directly from God than a mother's love? Blessed be His Name for the gift of holy matrimony and all the relations of love and duty that flow from it. And as for food, it matters not what kind of sustenance nourishes our earthly bodies for their brief sojourn here below. So long as intemperance and waste and selfishness are kept away, one kind of food or drink is as good as another. God made all His gifts for our use in various ways of nourishment or medicine. Glory be to His rich mercy.

4. For every creature of God is good, and nothing to be refused, if it be received with thanksgiving: 5. for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

All creation is full of signs of God's mercy; all our life should be full of thankfulness to our Maker. The custom of asking a blessing or returning thanks at meals serves to remind us of that Divine love which provides food and makes it pleasant to us. Our own daily meals are reminders of that Holy Feast in which God nourishes our souls through outward signs. Since God has been pleased to choose bread and wine and sanctify them to such a great dignity, we recognise that all creatures are good, and capable of receiving His blessing.

6. If thou put the brethren in remembrance of these things, thou shalt be a good minister of Jesus Christ, nourished up in the words of faith and of good doctrine, whereunto thou hast attained.

The soul wants nourishment as well as the body, and God's Word supplies it with abundance of wholesome diet. O Lord, give us a keen hunger and thirst for Thy truth. Let it be our daily support. Let us grow in spiritual things through its strength. Praise to Thy mercy that we have so many opportunities of learning about Thee.

7. But refuse profane and old wives' fables, and exercise thyself rather unto godliness.

Godliness rests on the foundation of a reasonable faith, is nourished by the study of Holy Scripture, is in agreement with all the deepest thoughts we have. A Christian does not pin his faith on dreams, does not believe in luck, is untouched by silly superstitions. He fears God, and therefore is afraid of nothing else.

8. For bodily exercise profiteth little : but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.

I have two lives to live ; one here, and another in the world to come. If this one were all, I might scarcely have strength to live it according to the Divine law ; my frailty would overcome my duty. But God's dear mercy has enlarged my view ; I can look forward into eternity. Though time and earth pass away, yet one who believes in God's promises has a sure foundation.

9. This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation.

The verse about the life that now is and that which is to come is one of those faithful sayings on which Christians in apostolic days loved to dwell. The Old Testament spoke chiefly of this life ; the New Testament does not forget this life, but throws much more light on the future. Be persuaded that this is true ; all ages bear witness to it ; godliness is the best way now and for eternity, whatever the world may say.

10. For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe.

We should be fools indeed but for our unseen Divine Helper and Friend. He will justify our trust, will bring us safely through this life's troubles, and set us in a better life than this. What if we have to bear contempt and worse ; still we are quiet, knowing that

we shall be proved right at last. Those who have no God to trust in will find themselves very destitute.

11. These things command and teach.

This is a Christian minister's business. He has to proclaim a message from his Master, and he has also to find a way for Divine truth into men's minds and thoughts. He commands with authority, he reasons and persuades with patience. O Lord, may our characters be such that we may not contradict Thy holy purpose for us. To be sensible of one's own folly, weakness, and worldliness, makes a stammering tongue. Who are we, that God should speak by us?

12. Let no man despise thy youth; but be thou an example of the believers, in word, in conversation, in charity, in spirit, in faith, in purity.

Other Christians will take pattern by us, following our words, or saying what they hear us say ; reproducing our ways or behaviour ; having as much or as little love as we have ; believing firmly or insufficiently according as we do ; being modest, reverent, gentle or not, according as they see us so. O God, how serious is this responsibility ! how can we escape it ? We are bound to make others like ourselves.

13. Till I come, give attendance to reading, to exhortation, to doctrine.

I have to read Holy Scripture daily ; thus I have before me the warnings and promises of God, His mysteries and mercies without number. I have to preach and shew people their duty, and, in finding motives for them and trying to affect their hearts, I ought to find my own heart touched also. I have to inculcate doctrine, teach the children the points of Christian faith, shew what is needful for salvation ; thus I get to learn the faith better myself. O happy and sacred calling ! may those who have it remember what their duties are towards souls.

14. Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

This means a gift bestowed in ordination. The blessings and prayers and promises dispensed there are 'no empty form. Those who come to be ordained receive a Divine gift through human hands ; they are linked on to the sacred chain of God's chosen witnesses, through whom in every age He bestows sacramental gifts. Aaron's seed were set apart to administer the shadow of heavenly things, but we have to do with the reality.

15. Meditate upon these things; give thyself wholly to them; that thy profiting may appear to all.

Those who take this verse for their motto will not spend so much time on amusement, will have less knowledge than others of art and curiosities, will be indifferent to heaping up wealth, or surrounding themselves with rarities. No, they have got their own business, the study of God's truth, and the bringing it home to men's souls. They find infinite delight in teaching and comforting their brethren, and making them feel what Divine mercy is.

16. Take heed unto thyself, and unto the doctrine ; continue in them : for in doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee.

This is a treasure that grows by dividing. We must store up good thoughts, holy promises, devout reflections, yet not for ourselves. They would spoil if we kept them for our own benefit only. All these things are to be shared with our brethren. The great treasures of God's Word are trusted to us that we may refresh thirsty souls with them.

CHAPTER V.

1. Rules to be observed in reproofing. 3. Of widows. 17. Of elders. 23. A precept for Timothy's health. 24. Some men's sins go before unto judgment, and some men's do follow after.

REBUKE not an elder, but intreat him as a father ; and the younger men as brethren ;

What is the secret of doing good by our reproofs and warnings ? This, no doubt, that we reproach with kindness and love. Harsh words leave a sting behind that poisons instead of healing. In our behaviour to elders we should bear our own parents in mind, in our conduct towards the young our own brothers. God has appointed the family to be the sacred pattern and rule of all our duty. How much we lose if we rend home asunder by strife !

2. The elder women as mothers ; the younger as sisters, with all purity.

All purity means to be pure in heart, and looks, and words. It requires of us to be on our guard in all times and places. It bids us remember our own frailty and our need of constant prayers to God to strengthen our weak nature. Never be presumptuous ; never think you are too religious to fall into sin. Let your strength and security be only in God's mercy.

3. Honour widows that are widows indeed.

Treat with reverence those who are thus thrown upon the tenderness of God; they have lost their earthly stay and prospects, but God has designs of mercy for them, calls them to a more religious life, offers them new duties and interests. They are called to put aside this world and keep heaven in view. God has been with them in their darkest hours.

4. *But if any widow have children or nephews, let them learn first to show piety at home, and to requite their parents: for that is good and acceptable before God.*

How full Scripture is of blessings and injunctions that have to do with the Fifth Commandment! We cannot prosper if we despise or neglect our parents. God is pleased to teach us His own Divine Fatherhood, His love, His providence, through the earthly relations of parents towards children. We trust father and mother, we obey them, we are grateful to them, and so learn to lift up our hearts to our Father in heaven.

5. *Now she that is a widow indeed, and desolate, trusteth in God, and continueth in supplications and prayers night and day. 6. But she that liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth.*

Here are two lives contrasted—the one of a widow who lives in prayer, the other of one who lives in pleasure. It is quite clear which is preferable in the apostle's eyes. Lord, when this world begins to darken, when friends die or forsake us, when we tread the declining road of life, let us have a love for prayer. Let church services be our frequent occupations, let God's Word, His praises, all that has to do with religion, be precious. Our true life consists in knowing and loving God.

7. *And these things give in charge, that they may be blameless.*

If such care was taken that these widows, who were supported by the Church, and occupied in attending to the poor, should be blameless, consider what standard the apostle would set before pastors themselves. Those who professed to serve God in the sacred ministry, and yet lived in pleasure, or neglected prayer, would, you may be sure, come under a much sharper condemnation than careless, worldly women. Alas, how far we are from being blameless, though our calling is so holy!

8. *But if any provide not for his own, and specially for those of his own house, he hath denied the faith, and is worse than an infidel.*

Here is a grave warning, enough to wake up those who neglect their own families, their servants, those who are intrusted to their care. What is the good of professing to believe in a heavenly Father or a Divine Saviour if we live selfish lives, and show no signs of charity? Provision must be of things needful for the soul as well as the body. It includes the knowledge of God's truth and opportunities of worshipping Him, as well as food and clothes. If we despise and neglect Christ's sheep whom He has put into our hands, He will utterly abhor us in the last day.

9. Let not a widow be taken into the number under three-score years old, having been the wife of one man, 10. well reported of for good works; if she have brought up children, if she have lodged strangers, if she have washed the saints' feet, if she have relieved the afflicted, if she have diligently followed every good work.

What a beautiful portrait of a good Christian woman! She has passed her life in caring for the young, the sick, the needy. She has brought a merciful, loving heart with her into all the duties of life. God would have her, as life draws to an end, live more entirely for Him, attend on His sanctuary, carry holy thoughts and prayers with her continually.

11. But the younger widows refuse: for when they have begun to wax wanton against Christ, they will marry; 12. having damnation, because they have cast off their first faith.

S. Paul would have widows who devoted themselves to Christ's service do so without reserve. Christ would be their all-sufficient portion, the Church their home, good works their occupation. He abhorred the notion that those who once had vowed themselves to this life should go back to the world. O Lord, strengthen us to keep our first promise; let us not become of the number of those who once were wholly Thine and now despise Thy service.

13. And withal they learn to be idle, wandering about from house to house; and not only idle, but tattlers also and busy-bodies, speaking things which they ought not.

A life dedicated to religious works, to the care of the poor, to attendance on God's House, has its own dangers. How easily such duties may be corrupted by sloth, by partiality, by a love for gossip! How soon our ears may be filled with slander, our hearts with folly! While we live on earth there is no security for us, nothing but temptation, and yet God is our help.

14. I will therefore that the younger women marry, bear

children, guide the house, give none occasion to the adversary to speak reproachfully.

Is it not so still? The weaknesses and follies of believers give occasion to men to scoff at religion itself. All of us who profess to serve Christ, whether in the sacred ministry, or in religious undertakings of any kind, whether we be men or women, are intrusted with our Master's honour. Our downfalls are reckoned to Him. This is the great argument against the gospel, the great stumblingblock in the way of multitudes. God grant that we may not add to it by our sins!

15. For some are already turned aside after Satan.

This was S. Paul's experience. He himself knew of widows who had rashly taken on themselves a vow to serve God in His Church, and give themselves wholly to works of mercy, and had not been able to fulfil it, nay, had gone right over to the devil's service instead. If such things happened in those first days of fervour, are we likely to be secure from them? Satan will have us, unless we cling closely to a better Master.

16. If any man or woman that believeth have widows, let them relieve them, and let not the church be charged; that it may relieve them that are widows indeed.

To relieve the aged, care for those who have any claim on us, work ungrudgingly for them, is God's order for us. Such duties bring a blessing with them. If God has put into our hands the power to do good, let us use it liberally, knowing that He will repay. All love shewn for His sake to the aged and infirm will be returned sevenfold in love and care when we come to need it.

17. Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine.

Priests need to pray for God's grace that they may rule well and teach well. Their position is not meant to be one of mere honour or mere ease, but of labour for Christ's people. In business matters it is diligence, activity, self-denial, it is a right judgment and patient waiting that find success. Does not the same hold true of spiritual things? The Lord would have His ministers devote as much thought to His concerns as this world's servants do to their office or trade.

18. For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

Christ employs oxen to tread out His corn, to separate the wheat from

the chaff. They must work hard to get through their task ; they should leave no souls untried. God's Word is the threshing instrument which they must apply to the souls of men. Our Master would have all the chaff cast away, all the good grain among men brought to light, and for this end He is pleased to employ the sacred ministry. Yet He will not leave His ministers without many blessings and rewards ; they will find His service a delightful one.

19. Against an elder receive not an accusation, but before two or three witnesses. 20. Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear.

Alas ! can those who enter the ministry with high thoughts and visions, who rejoice to choose God as their portion and sacred duties for their daily task, can such be subject to accusations, can they be tempted, nay, fall ? How great a contrast between their ordination and the public shame of rebuke and scandal ! Take heed when you read such verses, and remember that many who once were fervent have gone astray. Indeed they were happy who were found out in their sin and recalled to penitence.

21. I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

The thought of God's judgment should make us judge uprightly. A day approaches when all men's judgments will be reviewed by the Great Judge of all. In that great assize, O Lord, have mercy upon me. What are dignities of this earth, sentences and condemnations here below, compared with the majesty of that day ?

22. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins : keep thyself pure.

I partake in other men's sins if, being a priest, I encourage sinners to approach God's altar lightly and without true repentance. May God's mercy keep me from this dangerous laxity. I should only ruin them and myself also by encouraging such familiarity with holy things. But any Christian may partake in his brethren's sins by laughing at them, approving them, wishing he had done the same.

23. Drink no longer water, but use a little wine for thy stomach's sake and thine often infirmities.

S. Timothy, whose health was feeble, was urged by the apostle to use a little wine instead of always taking water by itself. S. Paul thought this change would benefit his friend's digestion. Nothing that could be of service to Timothy was beneath his notice. In-

deed we are generally too ready to catch at relaxations for ourselves. We are on the side of too much indulgence, for the most part. May God give us wisdom so to order our lives that we may enjoy health of body and soul, and power to work for Him. Yet if He sends us frequent infirmities, it is not without a merciful design for us.

24. Some men's sins are open beforehand, going before to judgment ; and some men they follow after.

What care is required in admitting men to the Christian ministry ! an unworthy priest is a lasting scandal, who does harm all his life, and pulls down other men's faith. A great responsibility lies on those who promote any one's ordination by advice, testimonials, or any kind of encouragement. Either he will be a blessing or a curse to many souls wherever he ministers.

25. Likewise also the good works of some are manifest beforehand ; and they that are otherwise cannot be hid.

Lord, give us eyes to discern good works ; let us be as ready to acknowledge good as to condemn evil. What a wretched spirit it is to be always looking out for the bad side of characters, detecting hypocrites, finding out faults, and yet have no appreciation of all the love and zeal that are to be traced around ! If we love good works ourselves we shall be ready to discern them in other lives.

CHAPTER VI.

- v. Of the duty of servants. 3. Not to have fellowship with newfangled teachers. 6. Godliness is great gain, 10. and love of money the root of all evil. 11. What Timothy is to fly, and what to follow, 17. and whereof to admonish the rich. 20. To keep the purity of true doctrine, and to avoid profane janglings.

LE T as many servants as are under the yoke count their own masters worthy of all honour, that the name of God and his doctrine be not blasphemed.

In so many of his Epistles S. Paul shews thought for the condition of slaves. He took care to put in some word to guide, enlighten, or comfort them in the many perils of their hard condition. He bade them remember that the gospel did not come to break up human order and subjection, but rather to sanctify it and bring good out of it. As Christians the slaves were to behave obediently and uprightly, because they had a Divine Master : His honour was

in their hands. God would be praised or blamed according as Christians behaved.

2. And they that have believing masters, let them not despise them, because they are brethren ; but rather do them service, because they are faithful and beloved, partakers of the benefit. These things teach and exhort.

Now that I feel that Christ has died for me, that I am God's child and an heir of heaven, should such thoughts, such hopes, make me neglectful of my duties here? Should I presume on God's grace to be selfish, slothful, neglectful of my work? This would not be gospel teaching. God's Word bids us remember that our brethren are dear to Him, He is in them; hardness, irreverence, unkindness to them is a slight offered to Himself. A true Christian brings into all his work a dutiful and loving spirit, just because he knows about Christ Jesus, Who is the pattern of all love.

3. If any man teach otherwise, and consent not to wholesome words, even the words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the doctrine which is according to godliness ; 4. he is proud, knowing nothing, but doting about questions and strifes of words, whereof cometh envy, strife, railings, evil surmisings, 5. perverse disputings of men of corrupt minds, and destitute of the truth, supposing that gain is godliness : from such withdraw thyself.

Let us take warning by the errors here pointed out. Christ's own words should be our study, we are safe there; godliness our chief aim, not mere inquiring or boasting about religious questions; and, above all, we should keep covetousness away. If our religion was merely a means of rising in the world it would not have a spark of light or warmth for ourselves. It is easy to treat religious matters, doctrines, hymns, church ornaments, works of charity, in a thoroughly irreligious spirit. This is to turn all God's best gifts to our own harm.

6. But godliness with contentment is great gain.

Faith makes us rich in this true sense. It blesses what we have, and makes us content with it. Here is a great treasure which does more to satisfy the heart than royal splendours could do. When we feel that God is our Father, and that He has given us riches of grace and promises of glory, then we are willing to put up with this present life, and use thankfully what God gives us in it.

7. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.

Just as I came, so I shall go. As I came forth naked from my mother's womb, so I shall return to the womb of earth, the mother of all. I shall have to leave to some one else's disposal all my cherished possessions. My very clothes will be worn by another. Such a thought checks our extreme desire to heap up treasure ; not one penny of it can we take with us to begin the next world with.

8. And having food and raiment let us be therewith content.

These words are contrary to the general feeling of mankind ; they are hard to receive, but need all the more our careful attention. What anxious hours, what strain on body and mind, what dangerous speculations and bitter remorse would be avoided if men kept these words in mind ! How liberally our hands would be opened to help the poor ; what trust we should have in God's goodness ! If food and covering for us and our dear ones has been provided, then out of our superfluity we can do good and help on God's cause.

9. But they that will be rich full into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and hurtful lusts, which drown men in destruction and perdition.

Here again we stare, and scarcely trust our eyes and ears. Do not all men desire to be rich ? Are not riches the means of comfort and power, the instrument of all good works ? Trust S. Paul, he knows human nature well ; he brings light from above to bear upon hearts, and he sees there so terrible and all-absorbing a passion for wealth that it swallows up devotion, and conscience, and duty. Nothing can stand against it.

10. For the love of money is the root of all evil : which while some coveted after, they have erred from the faith, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Lord, enable me to combat this dangerous passion by an open-handed charity, by patiently putting up with losses, by diligent prayer and meditation on Thy holy Word, by frequent access to Thy altar. Greater and better persons than I have been overthrown by it. As I grow old, let the prospect of heavenly riches and glories become clearer to my eyes and out-dazzle this world's treasures.

11. But thou, O man of God, flee these things ; and follow after righteousness, godliness, faith, love, patience, meekness.

The very title, "Man of God," has warnings and instructions for a Christian pastor. If he is a man of God he will be employed on God's business, represent God's character, stand up for God's side. He will beware of enslaving his soul to covetousness. This verse contains a list of true riches which we should covet exceed-

ingly, and long to store up more and more, and which can never be wasted nor stolen. These are pure gold and jewels, which will be our adornment and comfort here and hereafter.

12. Fight the good fight of faith, lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art also called, and hast professed a good profession before many witnesses.

He professed the faith in his baptism, in an upright and Christian life, in his ordination as priest and bishop, and after this (it is said) in dying a martyr's death. The Creed is a good profession ; it speaks of God, and Christ, and the Holy Spirit, and life everlasting. It is the standard under which Christ's soldiers fight. They would die sooner than give it up.

13. I give thee charge in the sight of God, who quickeneth all things, and before Christ Jesus, who before Pontius Pilate witnessed a good confession,

Christ Jesus bore witness to the truth. He did so in full view of the Cross. Now from His throne in heaven He regards His servants in their trial hour, and bids them speak up boldly for Him. Whatever man may say, I rest on the power of God Who created me, and on Jesus Christ Who redeemed me ; therefore I am not afraid to confess my faith.

14. That thou keep this commandment without spot, unrebukeable, until the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ :

Our probation lasts but a little while longer ; then our death or Christ's judgment will end it. Till Christ comes we have to keep safe His Word, His grace, our hearts, all that He has given us to guard. Enemies would fain rob us, or destroy our treasure, but we are on guard, and ready for them. Christ's coming is a thought of joy and hope to some, but a mockery or a dread to unfaithful servants, coward soldiers.

15. Which in his times he shall shew, who is the blessed and only Potentate, the King of kings, and Lord of lords ; 16. who only hath immortality, dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto ; whom no man hath seen, nor can see : to whom be honour and power everlasting. Amen.

Now is the time to serve Divine truth in humble guise, amidst darkness and dangers. One day truth will appear in glorious majesty, with everlasting rewards for the faithful. Let us share boldly the condition of Christ's humble hidden life if we would one day enjoy a share in His glory. God is Eternal, Invisible, Almighty ; the

splendours of this world, which strike the senses, are but passing shadows.

17. Charge them that are rich in this world, that they be not highminded, nor trust in uncertain riches, but in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy;

This and the two following verses contain a gospel for the rich. Here is their duty to God. They must trust in Him with all their heart. His love, His mercy, His hand daily stretched out to help them must be their dependence, not the riches that they have stored up. Their great danger is to rest confidently upon their wealth ; their great safeguard to pray and fill their minds with thoughts of God's goodness.

18. That they do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to distribute, willing to communicate;

Here is rich men's duty towards their neighbour. They must help in all good works, and this cheerfully, humbly, readily. God has intrusted them with so large a part of His bounties to distribute among their brethren ; they are His stewards, and have to render an account of their administration. Wherever they live they should be centres of mercy and all good works.

19. Laying up in store for themselves a good foundation against the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life.

Here is rich men's duty towards themselves. Provide an eternal mansion, an unwasting treasure. What can you carry away of fine houses, good clothes, rich ornaments ? Not a fragment ; all these remain outside the coffin, and are only for the enjoyment of the next heir. But money well laid out for the needy, for God's truth, for men's benefit, remains and brings an everlasting blessing. How foolish those rich men are who have made all their provision for this life only !

20. O Timothy, keep that which is committed to thy trust, avoiding profane and vain babblings, and oppositions of science falsely so called :

The Christian faith is a priceless treasure ; those who hold it fast enjoy infinite comfort and peace ; those who lose it lose what all this world cannot replace. It is not our own, but comes from above, nor can it be held fast in our own strength, but by God's grace in us. Science enlightens only a few chosen minds, but grace speaks to all alike.

*21. Which some professing have erred concerning the faith.
Grace be with thee. Amen.*

Then false science has led some souls astray from the truth. Lord, open our hearts to receive Thy message, and make us love and practise it day by day. May we hand on to others Thy holy gospel as we have received it. We in our day have to learn Christian doctrine, to practise it, to teach it, just as S. Timothy had. The warnings, the encouragements, the promises he enjoyed, are ours also.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO TIMOTHY

CHAPTER I.

1. Paul's love to Timothy, and the unfeigned faith which was in Timothy himself, his mother, and grandmother. 6. He is exhorted to stir up the gift of God which was in him, 8. to be stedfast, and patient in persecution, 13. and to persist in the form and truth of that doctrine which he had learned of him. 15. Phygelius and Hermogenes, and such like, are noted, and Onesiphorus is highly commended.

**PAUL, an apostle of Jesus Christ by the will of God,
according to the promise of life which is in Christ Jesus,**

This is the last letter that we have of S. Paul's. It was written not many months before his death. We find him as full of courage, faith, and tenderness as ever. Old age and approaching death had not altered him. He still exercises the commission that Christ gave him, and God designed him to fulfil. He still preaches eternal life through Christ, and tells men how to obtain it. When a Christian has such thoughts and hopes up to the end, can we doubt that he still feels thus and prays thus when death has withdrawn him from our eyes?

2. *To Timothy, my dearly beloved son : Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and Christ Jesus our Lord.*

He desires for one so dear not riches, nor preferment, nor reputation, but grace to win souls, mercy to cover transgressions, peace to bear up against doubts and fears. If these gifts are ours, our earthly condition matters less.

3. *I thank God, whom I serve from my forefathers with pure conscience, that without ceasing I have remembrance of thee in my prayers night and day ;*

If S. Paul was anxious for Timothy, and so prayed constantly for

him, have we not reason to intercede for our dear ones? The apostle in his busy anxious life made time for his prayers. He knew how constant business dries up the heart; how even good men are exceedingly in danger of neglecting their prayers. It is a grievous thing to be so plunged in care and worry that we do not approach God's throne to present our intercessions or thanksgivings regularly.

4. Greatly desiring to see thee, being mindful of thy tears, that I may be filled with joy;

They had shed tears at parting, they looked forward to a joyful meeting. Apostolic hearts were not cold, but full of tender love. So much knit these two together that they could not but feel grief at losing sight of each other, though but for a while. God's saints look forward to a day when all tears will be wiped away, and only joy remain.

5. When I call to remembrance the unfeigned faith that is in thee, which dwelt first in thy grandmother Lois, and thy mother Eunice; and I am persuaded that in thee also.

Timothy had inherited the true faith from his mother and grandmother. Their example, their prayers, their teaching, had drawn him to Christ. Let Christian mothers remember that they have to hand on religion to their children. Boys and girls will be reverent, devout, careful to pray, glad to attend God's house, if they see that all this is their mother's first thought. She has committed to her by God the first tender years of her child's mind, to plant these graces there.

6. Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

The fire of heavenly love needs stirring, needs fresh fuel, must be watched and tended if it is to burn bright. How easily it becomes dull and cold if we do not stir it up afresh! Lord, kindle it again in us, that so we may renew it in other hearts.

7. For God hath not given us the spirit of fear; but of power, and of love, and of a sound mind.

With the Holy Spirit in our hearts we do not fear scoffs or blows, or death itself, but remain calm and peaceful, and do our duty courageously. A Christian minister has power as relying on God's Almightiness, love for those souls for whom Christ died, and soberness or self-control as essential to his work, and enabling him to guide his brethren: what use will he be without these gifts?

8. Be not thou therefore ashamed of the testimony of our

Lord, nor of me his prisoner: but be thou partaker of the afflictions of the gospel according to the power of God;

Jesus our Lord, His saints, and His gospel, all meet with contempt at the world's hands. All the more, therefore, should they be precious and honourable to us. This warning, not to be ashamed, is always necessary. Our coward hearts are apt to covet men's praise and fear men's ridicule. They need strength from on high.

9. Who hath saved us, and called us with an holy calling, not according to our works, but according to his own purpose and grace, which was given us in Christ Jesus before the world began,

What a word this would be to bring home to a careless, ignorant person! How his whole life would be changed by the knowledge of God's love for him, of God having provided for him grace and mercy and an entrance into heaven! No one could resist this attraction. Here is God's love for us even in our misery and vileness. He has made us, cared for us, provided for us faith and grace and glory. What dull, cold hearts are ours not to answer to such great love!

10. But is now made manifest by the appearing of our Saviour Jesus Christ, who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the gospel:

What nature says, what the law says, about eternal life is dark and dim compared with the gospel. We could indeed guess dimly at a God of love, at happiness as His purpose, at holiness as His rule for us, at a better life than this is. But oh, how feeble was our sight! we scarcely groped along. Now the words of Jesus Christ, His rising again, His heavenly promises and gifts, have let in a flood of light. God keep it from ever being darkened for us.

11. Whereunto I am appointed a preacher, and an apostle, and a teacher of the Gentiles.

The sacred ministry is not merely an office of dignity or of leisure, it has work to do. God requires at least as much diligence, activity, and skill in doing His business as an earthly master would. How miserable is the condition of those ministers of the gospel who enjoy the honour that their high office brings, and forget that the whole object of their calling is to win souls to God! If they do not do that, they are useless servants, bad workmen.

12. For the which cause I also suffer these things: nevertheless I am not ashamed: for I know whom I have believed, and am persuaded that he is able to keep that which I have committed unto him against that day.

What do we trust to God's hands? Ourselves, dear friends, if we believe. We commit body, soul, and spirit into His hands, for life and death. While we live we will obey Him, give up our life and strength to serve Him, and win our brethren to the same service. When we die we will lie down with a quiet mind, knowing that He will raise us up again. If we believe in the power and mercy of God, we can trust Him though all the world turn against us.

13. Hold fast the form of sound words, which thou hast heard of me, in faith and love which is in Christ Jesus. 14. That good thing which was committed unto thee keep by the Holy Ghost which dwelleth in us.

What does God trust to our hands? The holy catholic faith which we have been taught. It is a treasure beyond price, able to serve for this life and for eternity. Unless we guard it carefully we may lose it. Some have done so, and oh, what a loss! Without prayer we may be robbed of our faith, or it may become lifeless and unprofitable.

15. This thou knowest, that all they which are in Asia be turned away from me; of whom are Phygellus and Hermogenes.

This seems to refer to some occasion when the Asiatic Christians had an opportunity of visiting or helping the imprisoned apostle, and this they had neglected, through cowardice or indifference. Ah! let us use chances of doing good when they come. How soon they pass, and how bitter afterwards is the remembrance of the good we might have done, but can never do now!

16. The Lord give mercy unto the house of Onesiphorus; for he oft refreshed me, and was not ashamed of my chain: 17. but, when he was in Rome, he sought me out very diligently, and found me.

In the great city Onesiphorus took pains to find out S. Paul, penetrated to his prison, brought him continual comfort and assistance. Thus his humble good deeds won the apostle's gratitude and blessing. O Lord, give us grace to persevere in a good work. Let no pleasure nor business turn away our attention from Thy suffering members. Let us put Thy cause first, and attend to that.

18. The Lord grant unto him that he may find mercy of the Lord in that day: and in how many things he ministered unto me at Ephesus, thou knowest very well.

So, when our friends have passed away from this world, and we can

no longer enjoy their help nor hold actual intercourse with them, we may still remember with love what they have done for us, and commend them to God's infinite mercy. The best of us are not beyond the need of a prayer for mercy. When the great day of the general resurrection shall come, make them to receive their bodies again to glory, then made pure and incorruptible, set them at Thy right hand, O Lord, with Thy holy and elect.

CHAPTER II.

2. He is exhorted again to constancy and perseverance, and to do the duty of a faithful servant of the Lord in dividing the word aright, and staying profane and vain babblings. 17. Of Hymenaeus and Philetus. 19. The foundation of the Lord is sure. 22. He is taught whereof to beware, and what to follow after, and in what sort the servant of the Lord ought to behave himself.

THOU therefore, my son, be strong in the grace that is in Christ Jesus.

The apostle's sufferings, the desertions of friends, the persecutions that Christians had to bear, were likely to weigh on Timothy's heart and make him lose courage. In our own day there is much to discourage believers, but Scripture bids us be strong and fear not. God's hosts will win at last. His grace is more able to save than all our enemies to hinder.

2. And the things that thou hast heard of me among many witnesses, the same commit thou to faithful men, who shall be able to teach others also.

The faith has come down to us by the teaching, the examples, the prayers of those who went before. They handed on the treasure of Christian faith and duty, so that it has reached our own day. How many brave struggles, hearty acts of devotion, of self-sacrifice, of patience, in order that we might profit ! It is for us that all the ages have loved and worked. May we hand on to those who shall come after us these same blessings ! Unless we teach the children about Jesus Christ, who will believe on Him in the next generation ?

3. Thou therefore endure hardness, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. 4. No man that warreth entangleth himself with the affairs of this life; that he may please him who hath chosen him to be a soldier.

Christ's soldier must not seek pleasure or undertake business that

interferes with his duty. The Lord has enemies to be fought, marches to accomplish, burdens to bear. His pay is good, His uniform noble, His weapons strong, but He will have nothing to do with a slothful or cowardly service. He requires our whole heart and soul, and mind and strength.

5. And if a man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully.

Christ's wrestler has to bear in mind the rules of training ; he will never get the victory otherwise. He has to abstain from many things that another might enjoy, bring his life into rule, bear hard blows and falls patiently. What business has a minister of Christ with an easy, luxurious life ? The Lord will never give the prize to such an one.

6. The husbandman that laboureth must be first partaker of the fruits.

Christ's labourer must go out into the fields early, bear wind or cold, give long patience till the harvest comes. Unless he worked hard weeds would grow up all round instead of corn. At the end of the day will be time to rest, but while life lasts we ought not to take other leisure or refreshment than such as fits us to carry off our work for the Great Master.

7. Consider what I say ; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things.

The apostle has offered you three parables—the soldier, the wrestler, the labourer. Draw a lesson from each, and apply it to your own practice. How many brave soldiers, stout wrestlers, patient labourers, rebuke the slothful Christian ! Is not our reward infinitely greater, our consolations sweeter, our Master far more glorious and more grateful than all that the world's callings can show ?

8. Remember that Jesus Christ of the seed of David was raised from the dead according to my gospel :

Here is the strength of faith, here is the source of true comfort. God became Incarnate, Christ rose again from the dead. This marvellous story enables us to look beyond this world, to know of higher laws, deeper treasures, than earthly wisdom can disclose. If Christ the Lord overcame death, then the invisible world is real, and our hopes will not be mocked.

9. Wherein I suffer trouble, as an evil doer, even unto bonds ; but the word of God is not bound.

Hands may be chained, but heart and tongue are free. Soon even

the chains will fall off, in the freedom of heaven. The apostle reminds his friend that human tyranny could not fetter God's power. He wrought mightily to convert souls, even where human preachers could not go, nor human words reach. Is not the same true now? Now God's Word flies abroad through vast continents, in ways that His providence makes.

10. Therefore I endure all things for the elect's sakes, that they may also obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.

Men will suffer much pain or toil for glory or for love, or to win a reward. As Christ's soldiers have such an infinitely greater end before them, ought they not to display infinite patience, infinite courage too? When the end comes, and ransomed souls appear that have to thank us for this knowledge of salvation, can there be a greater joy than that?

11. It is a faithful saying: For if we be dead with him, we shall also live with him:

Martyrdom is rare, but calls to share Christ's Death are frequent. That was the meaning of our Baptism. His Cross and Grave were there represented, and a share in them laid upon us. Our Christian life should be one of mortification, that so Christ's inward life may begin in our hearts, and one day burst forth in everlasting joy. We cannot expect to have all our enjoyment here, and hereafter too.

12. If we suffer, we shall also reign with him: if we deny him, he also will deny us:

In these verses is the ring of Christ's own words when He spoke of taking up the cross and following after Him. What are sufferings and scoffs endured for this short life, compared with what comes afterwards? Men deny Christ when they deny His Name, His Church, His profession, throw in their lot with sin, behave as heathens. There are many ways of denying Him and taking the devil for our master instead. Lord, keep us from them.

13. If we believe not, yet he abideth faithful: he cannot deny himself.

He is faithful and true; He will reward His servants, will punish His enemies. What He has said will come to pass in spite of all that the world may say. May He forgive our past unfaithfulness, and help us when the hour of trial comes, that we may not lose our faith; indeed that would be an infinite loss.

14. Of these things put them in remembrance, charging them

before the Lord that they strive not about words to no profit, but to the subverting of the hearers.

The evils of a controversial spirit are (1) that unbelievers are repelled from the gospel by the bitterness and strife that they see amongst us ; (2) that we lose charity towards each other and become further and further asunder ; (3) that by insisting stoutly on one side only of the truth we often go on to positive heresy, and lose hold of truth altogether.

15. Study to shew thyself approved unto God, a workman that needeth not to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth.

We are what we are in God's sight ; man's judgment matters much less. Let us never give God reason to be ashamed of us ; we on our part must never be ashamed of serving Him in the humblest ministries. The poor, the children, the simple, have all a claim for their portion of God's Word. None are outside our heavenly Father's care, and we must not think ourselves above providing for them.

16. But shun profane and vain babblings: for they will increase unto more ungodliness.

Was there not need for S. Paul to repeat continually this advice to a Christian minister, to avoid foolish talkers ? The tongue so easily goes astray, especially in speaking on religious matters—rash words do so much harm—unbelief, ungodliness, strife of all kinds amongst Christians, spring from words thoughtlessly said and hastily taken up. Indeed, as to the tongue, who can tell how oft he offendeth ? Lord, help us to remember that we have to give account for our words.

17. And their word will eat as doth a canker: of whom is Hymenaeus and Philetus; 18. who concerning the truth have erred, saying that the resurrection is past already; and overthrow the faith of some.

The Resurrection has already taken place in this sense, that Christ Himself has risen in Body and Soul, and that His Spirit has quickened dead souls to believe ; but it still remains to be fulfilled in the raising up of dead bodies to a new and heavenly life at the Last Day. If we lost this hope we should lose all. The resurrection of the body and the life everlasting are parts of that faith which we professed at the Font.

19. Nevertheless the foundation of God standeth sure, having this seal, The Lord knoweth them that are his. And, Let every one that nameth the name of Christ depart from iniquity.

In spite of human errors, God's Church remains firm through all the ages, resting on the deep foundation of Divine love and power. Two inscriptions are seen on its walls ; the one declaring God's inscrutable foreknowledge, and the other our duty. Each is true, each is from Him, each is to be received and believed. The one bids me adore that infinite wisdom which is above my comprehension, the other bids me live an active life of holiness.

20. But in a great house there are not only vessels of gold and of silver, but also of wood and of earth; and some to honour, and some to dishonour.

In God's palace here below is a great mixture, gold appearing as well as clay, honourable ornaments amidst common refuse ; but patience—this is but for a while. The Divine Master is busy purifying, shaping, preparing His chosen vessels ; one day He will have finished His work. Let us patiently await its issue.

21. If a man therefore purge himself from these, he shall be a vessel unto honour, sanctified, and meet for the master's use, and prepared unto every good work.

Which kind of vessels are we ? Consider whether the heart is full of good thoughts, the tongue of upright words ; whether the whole life is obedient to Christ's law. Such are the vessels which God is pleased to choose. Only, O Lord, Thy grace can work marvels here. Vessels of wood and clay, nay, foul and dishonourable and broken ones, have been changed by Thy mercy into purified gold. Oh, might it be so with my foolish heart !

22. Flee also youthful lusts : but follow righteousness, faith, charity, peace, with them that call on the Lord out of a pure heart.

Things which are only silly or trifling in others become offences in a priest's mouth. He is pulling down and injuring God's cause unless his life and behaviour are edifying. Here are four excellent objects of life propounded to him : let him be upright in all his doings, keep the true faith, show active love, be at peace with his brethren. If these are a minister's characteristics, how he will help forward God's cause !

23. But foolish and unlearned questions avoid, knowing that they do gender strifes.

The experience of so many ages of Church history bears out the apostle's repeated warning against controversy. He impresses on us most earnestly the practical character of religion. It is the way of love and duty, not a mere triumph of arguments. It is not meant to gratify our curiosity, but improve our lives. How con-

stantly, how anxiously he bids us beware of the spirit of intellectual display thrusting itself into religious subjects !

24. And the servant of the Lord must not strive ; but be gentle unto all men, apt to teach, patient,

Such was our Saviour's own character. He was meek and lowly of heart. He would not break the bruised reed or quench the smoking flax. This is the true method of converting souls. We owe gentleness to all men, instruction to the ignorant, patience to the vexatious or disagreeable. A dictatorial, self-asserting manner does not become the Lord's servants, nor incline our brethren to listen to us.

25. In meekness instructing those that oppose themselves ; if God peradventure will give them repentance to the acknowledging of the truth ; 26. and that they may recover themselves out of the snare of the devil, who are taken captive by him at his will.

Do not presume on a sinner's recovery, and do not despair of it. One thief perished close to our Lord's own saving Cross, and one was brought to repentance there, and entered Paradise along with Christ. If we ourselves have turned from darkness to light we shall feel how great is God's mercy ; we shall urge our brethren to seek it ; we shall pray for their souls with full trust in God. At least we can remind them of the misery of sin, of its wretched end, of our Father's great love.

CHAPTER III.

1. He advertiseth him of the times to come, 6. describeth the enemies of the truth, 10. propoundeth unto him his own example, 16. and commendeth the holy scriptures.

THIS know also, that in the last days perilous times shall come.

Such warnings must have fallen chill on believers' ears in the first bright daylight of the gospel. Did not the Cross triumph, and the Church rise up, and the Prince of this world fall down in confusion ? Yes ; but even with all the successes which Christ's Spirit wrought, there was coming a harvest of evils from within, Christian graces and opportunities all turned to evil use. S. Paul foresees what the state of Christ's Church would be when it had spread widely over the world.

2. For men shall be lovers of their own selves, covetous, boasters, proud, blasphemers, disobedient to parents, unthankful, unholy, 3. without natural affection, trucebreakers, false accusers, incontinent, fierce, despisers of those that are good, 4. traitors, heady, highminded, lovers of pleasures more than lovers of God;

Here are all the vices which the apostle had once (Rom. i. 28-31) observed with horror amongst heathens now creeping in among professing Christians too. What struck him with grief was to see that Christians could become such as he here describes. Could pride and self-will, and cruelty and vice, be found amongst those who believed in one God, one Saviour, one sanctifying Spirit, who had been washed from their sins once, who had drawn nigh to God's altar, and received grace there? Yes, indeed, it would be so, and we know ourselves that the fact is so. What possibilities of evil we each carry within our own hearts! Lord, guard us from ourselves.

5. Having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof: from such turn away.

Having a form of godliness means going to church or talking about religious subjects. Denying the power of godliness means allowing sin to rule the heart and life. The whole verse speaks of that extraordinary severance between profession and practice which is the scandal and shame of many Christians.

6. For of this sort are they which creep into houses, and lead captive silly women laden with sins, led away with divers lusts,

How shall women protect themselves against such seducers? Let them keep to the old ways of duty, of patient obedience, of reading God's Word, of prayer. They will find in a humble and diligent performance of duty protection against the novelties in religion and irreligion which abound nowadays. God would have them abound in quietness, peace, and humility, not be always seeking for new guides.

7. Ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth.

Not only women, but many men also, are like this. They inquire, moralise, reflect upon nature, the world, and their own hearts, but yet no profit comes of the study, they are no closer to saving truth. Ah, what a great step it is from unprofitable to profitable knowledge! Lord, with all my getting make me get true understanding of Thee and of my own frailty.

8. *Now as Jannes and Jambres withheld Moses, so do these also resist the truth : men of corrupt minds, reprobate concerning the faith.* 9. *But they shall proceed no further : for their folly shall be manifest unto all men, as their's also was.*

Those two were the chief magicians of Egypt who withheld Moses in his efforts to deliver Israel, and tried to copy his miracles. They used their marvellous knowledge only to throw contempt on God's people, and contradict God's plan. Such is the evil fruit of knowledge used for mere vainglory. God's servants can persevere as Moses did, knowing that they have eternity on their side, and may be well content to wait patiently.

10. *But thou hast fully known my doctrine, manner of life, purpose, faith, longsuffering, charity, patience,*

His doctrine was sound, his manner of life simple and laborious, his purpose fixed, his faith steadfast, his charity embraced all persons, his patience endured all affronts. Timothy knew all this from years of intercourse ; we know it from reading the apostle's life and letters. The same standard is set before those whom God calls into the sacred ministry in our own day.

11. *Persecutions, afflictions, which came unto me at Antioch, at Iconium, at Lystra ; what persecutions I endured : but out of them all the Lord delivered me.*

The insults, blows, and stoning, the sudden change from applause to reviling, all the events related in Acts xiii. 50, and in chap. xiv., had gone to Timothy's heart. He was a native of that country, and had been no doubt drawn to S. Paul by witnessing what he had to bear, and his love and patience through it. The apostle recalls those old days when he and his friend first shared the same faith. He reminds him that God's mercy and power are still as great as they were then.

12. *Yea, and all that will live godly in Christ Jesus shall suffer persecution.*

We who serve God in quiet days ought to ponder on this verse. If we have no persecution to bear, no blows, no ridicule, no pain, if God has made the way of life easy for us, we can yet share in the graces of the holy saints and martyrs by feeling for others' sufferings, by leading a penitent, self-denying life, by praying for and assisting missionary work. If our time was all peaceful, all joyous, with no contradictions, it would be hard for us to advance much in God's service.

13. *But evil men and seducers shall wax worse and worse, deceiving, and being deceived.*

A sad condition, indeed, to have one's own way without check. Worst of all to succeed in leading others astray, and so to increase evil and multiply its ministers. Let all good Christians remember how many, how earnest, how successful are the devil's agents. Why is it that we who believe are doing so little to combat them?

14. But continue thou in the things which thou hast learned and hast been assured of, knowing of whom thou hast learned them ; 15. and that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.

What encouragement there is here to Christian mothers to bring up their children in the knowledge of God's Word ! All the Old Testament pointed onward to Christ ; its lessons of holiness, its promises, its deep aspirations, its warnings against disobedience, were all meant to prepare the hearers for the gospel. I desire to study diligently and teach the children the great marvels, holy precepts, earnest prayers which the Bible contains. Here is my best and dearest study.

16. All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness :

As Divine truth was personally incarnate for us in Mary's womb, so in a secondary manner it has come to dwell among us in inspired writings. God united Himself personally to our nature in Jesus Christ, but His Spirit has chosen human minds, words, writings, for His spiritual abode. The Holy Scriptures are the dwelling of Divine truth where it is preserved from age to age. All believers find guidance, comfort, instruction there ; they approach the Bible to listen to God's message.

17. That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works.

How marvellous it is that Christians should neglect Holy Scripture, and fill their minds with rubbish instead ! Unless we go to the fountain of Divine truth, and refresh our souls there, we shall find ourselves at a loss amidst the many errors and temptations that come. If I am to be ready in the day of battle, I must have got my arms in order in times of study and prayer.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He exhorteth him to do his duty with all care and diligence, 6. certifieth him of the nearness of his death, 9. willeth him to come speedily unto him, and to bring Marcus with him, and certain other things which he wrote for, 14. warneth him to beware of Alexander the smith, 16. informeth him what had befallen him at his first answering, 19. and soon after he concludeth.

I CHARGE thee therefore before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, who shall judge the quick and the dead at his appearing and his kingdom;

Here are motives to awake a slumbering pastor. God's majesty, Christ's glorious appearing to judge, the awakening of the dead, the gathering of the living before the judgment-seat, the shortness of this present world, the approach of eternity,—all these are reminders that our own salvation depends on our winning other souls.

2. *Preach the word; be instant in season, out of season; reprove, rebuke, exhort with all longsuffering and doctrine.*

It is not enough to preach sermons; we must try all ways to gain a soul. The physician perseveres with remedies, tries all ways to get the patient to take them, puts up with his pettishness, overcomes his reluctance. Oh for that love which alone can show us how to minister to sick souls, and raise them with prayers and patience to a new life!

3. *For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine; but after their own lusts shall they heap to themselves teachers, having itching ears; 4. and they shall turn away their ears from the truth, and shall be turned unto fables.*

Novelties in religion are often most popular, while the old paths are despised, and few walk in them. Now is the time which the apostle foretells, when sound doctrine and wise teachers and Divine truth should be unpalatable, and false substitutes welcomed instead. Have we courage to stand up for deserted truth when all men would persuade us otherwise?

5. *But watch thou in all things, endure afflictions, do the work of an evangelist, make full proof of thy ministry.*

God's servants must attend to all His business; it is not enough to

do one thing well and be praised by men for it, if we neglect another part of our office which is less conspicuous, and so incur God's anger. All our life must be watchful, all our behaviour patient, all our efforts directed to teach God's Word, if we would have our Master say to us, "Well done, good and faithful servant."

6. For I am now ready to be offered, and the time of my departure is at hand.

These are the words of a traveller just about to start for home. He has long been wandering in the world, but is now directing his steps elsewhere. A little more prayer, and danger, and anxiety, a few more partings, some concluding months, and all that great and wonderful life of the apostle would be over, only its fruits would remain in the world for ever. Let us steadily consider our own departure, and be ready when the summons comes to us.

7. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith :

So fight the battle, run the race, and guard the treasure, that you too may approach death in hope and peace. When a man has been faithful to Christ, and knows His mercy, then he will go forth to meet Him joyfully. The sense of our frailty, of our many neglects and downfalls, will be swallowed up at last in a conviction of the infinite love of God.

8. Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous judge, shall give me at that day : and not to me only, but unto all them also that love his appearing.

Take courage, this dazzling crown is not for S. Paul only, not only for great and heroic souls, but for the humblest believer who is faithful according to his opportunities. This is the touchstone by which to examine ourselves,—do we love Christ and look forward to meeting Him? He is all purity, all compassion, is faithful and true, has overcome by the Cross. Are we such that He will regard us as His friends?

9. Do thy diligence to come shortly unto me : 10. for Demas hath forsaken me, having loved this present world, and is departed unto Thessalonica ; Crescens to Galatia, Titus unto Dalmatia. 11. Only Luke is with me. Take Mark, and bring him with thee : for he is profitable to me for the ministry.

Observe God's providence and His various ways in dealing with souls. Of Crescens we know nothing whatever. Titus and Luke

were always faithful. Demas had once been stedfast, but now fell away. Mark had once drawn back, but was now a dear friend and fellow-labourer. Here is room for fear, and for hope, and for prayer. Who can tell if he will stand securely, when even the society of Christ's apostle did not restrain a waverer?

12. And Tychicus have I sent to Ephesus.

Perhaps to take Timothy's own place there while he journeyed to see the apostle for the last time. The approach of death made S. Paul more careful than ever to provide for his brethren's needs. His body was chained, but his heart went out to every place.

13. The cloke that I left at Troas with Carpus, when thou comest, bring with thee, and the books, but especially the parchments.

He was no less mindful of his books and parchments than of his cloak to keep off the cold. As his body needed the shelter of a cloak when winter drew near, so his mind the comfort and support of holy reading. Right up to his death he was always learning, studying, and writing. Death found him never idle, never ill-employed.

14. Alexander the coppersmith did me much evil : the Lord reward him according to his works : 15. of whom be thou ware also ; for he hath greatly withstood our words.

Plain words, grave warnings ; there are then two sides, that of good and that of evil ; God's saints on the one, His enemies on the other. God will reward each according to their works. Those who love Him must beware of associating with those who despise His Name. Sometimes the name of charity is misused to make all seem alike, good and evil, truth and error. Scripture does not speak thus.

16. At my first answer no man stood with me, but all men forsook me : I pray God that it may not be laid to their charge.

17. Notwithstanding the Lord stood with me, and strengthened me ; that by me the preaching might be fully known, and that all the Gentiles might hear : and I was delivered out of the mouth of the lion.

He had been in great danger, almost in the lion's mouth, and his friends were too saint-hearted to stand up for him or plead his cause ; but he was all the more conscious of the ever-present love and power of His Divine Master. He felt a Divine Friend with him, though unseen by men.

18. And the Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto his heavenly kingdom : to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Deliver us, O Lord, from evil ; from the tempter, and our own frailty, and the pressure of too great pain and care, and in the hour of death. We do not ask for perfect rest here below, but for Thy grace to bring us through whatever comes. For Thine is the kingdom, the power, and the glory ; all things are Thine, all creatures praise Thee ; Thou art our God for ever and ever.

19. Salute Prisca and Aquila, and the household of Onesiphorus. 20. Erastus abode at Corinth : but Trophimus have I left at Miletum sick. 21. Do thy diligence to come before winter. Eubulus greeteth thee, and Pudens, and Linus, and Claudia, and all the brethren.

S. Paul is the same right up to the last. He kept all through his life this kind, sympathising heart, full of gratitude, full of tender memories. Even when just about to leave this world and appear before God, he leaned on his friends' support, he lived in their faith ; it was death to him to lose them. No doubt he carried the same heart with him into Christ's Presence ; he still intercedes with us and for us, he still longs for us to join him in blessedness.

22. The Lord Jesus Christ be with thy spirit. Grace be with you. Amen.

This is the last word of S. Paul's that we possess. Some few months after writing this he was admitted into a better world. We know not the exact manner of his death, whether any of his friends were by to witness it, what time for preparation was allowed him. This at least we know, that he had faced death so often, and thought of it for so long, and believed so fully in Christ's victory over death, that when it came it was but a short space of darkness to cross, a few steps across the valley, and then he was in light for ever. He left us many messages from Jesus Christ, many thoughts about grace. He has but

“ Left our weary ways
To live in memory here, in heaven by love and praise ! ”

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO TITUS.

CHAPTER I.

2. For what end Titus was left in Crete. 6. How they that are to be chosen ministers ought to be qualified. 11. The mouths of evil teachers to be stopped : 12. and what manner of men they be.

PAUL, a servant of God, and an apostle of Jesus Christ, according to the faith of God's elect, and the acknowledging of the truth which is after godliness ;

S. Paul opens his message by announcing that he is God's servant ; it is his strength and glory to serve such a Master. But we too are God's servants by our creation, by holy Baptism, by being called to such or such a condition in life. Our Divine Master has laid certain duties upon us, and will require an account of them. Meanwhile His grace helps us, His mercy bears with our weakness. May the result of our life be to strengthen our brethren in the true faith and knowledge of God.

2. In hope of eternal life, which God, that cannot lie, promised before the world began ;

Our hope of heaven rests on this ; our God cannot deceive nor be deceived. He has announced to us His fixed purpose to bring His chosen into everlasting happiness. He has put thoughts of love, purity, praise, in our hearts, which this world can never realise. There is a promised land, an entire cleansing, a mansion that does not pass away. Our hearts' longings are taken up and explained by our Father's gracious promises.

3. But hath in due times manifested his word through preaching, which is committed unto me according to the commandment of God our Saviour ;

God has His own time and order in which to bring about His purposes. We must trust Him for this, and humbly endeavour to be His ready instruments. If He has chosen through our poor means to reveal His goodness to some darkened soul, all glory be to Him.

Consider, is it not a great honour to take a message from the Infinite God to any of His creatures?

4. To Titus, mine own son after the common faith: Grace, mercy, and peace, from God the Father and the Lord Jesus Christ our Saviour.

All Christians need such spiritual gifts as these, but ministers more than others, for their burden is greater, their dangers more numerous, their troubles and hindrances more grievous. If S. Paul could obtain for his friend and fellow-labourer these blessings he would be content; they are worth more than all preference or renown.

5. For this cause left I thee in Crete, that thou shouldest set in order the things that are wanting, and ordain elders in every city, as I had appointed thee:

Titus was appointed in S. Paul's place to govern the Christians in Crete and ordain presbyters for them. God was now, as the apostles were ending their course, appointing a settled parochial ministry to continue the work that they had begun. Indeed, clergy are but frail men, and the Church is far from what it should be; and yet we are grateful that an order of men has been set apart to conduct Divine service, minister to our souls, teach our children about heaven. The priesthood is a merciful assistance granted by God to help our weakness.

6. If any be blameless, the husband of one wife, having faithful children not accused of riot or unruly.

Our own family is our first sphere of work. Titus was to seek for clergy among those whose innocence, purity, power to guide and rule had been manifested in their home-life. Before we are called to do great things we must do well the humble duties which we find within our own walls. Patience, cheerfulness, reverence, should be taught at home by word and example.

7. For a bishop must be blameless, as the steward of God; not selfwilled, not soon angry, not given to wine, no striker, not given to filthy lucre; 8. but a lover of hospitality, a lover of good men, sober, just, holy, temperate;

Ah! dear Lord, implant in the heart of Thy ministers this gentle, pure, upright, merciful temper, that they may rightly represent Thee to their brethren. Thou art all goodness; let us for Thy sake be full of tenderness and goodness to all who need our ministry. If the priest is unmerciful, covetous, or vicious, will not the people take pattern by his life rather than his preaching?

9. *Holding fast the faithful word as he hath been taught, that he may be able by sound doctrine both to exhort and to convince the gainsayers.*

We must cling to the holy catholic faith, and teach it to our brethren. It is not mere human science nor philanthropy that will save souls. All around are darkness and error ; the priest's lips must keep knowledge and be able to impart it ; he himself needs to learn daily of God what he ought to speak.

10. *For there are many unruly and vain talkers and deceivers, specially they of the circumcision : 11. whose mouths must be stopped, who subvert whole houses, teaching things which they ought not, for filthy lucre's sake.*

These were Jewish Christians, who brought over into their Christian profession many strange errors and fables from their former Judaism. When false doctrine is taught among believers now, we must remember that error has always tried to find entrance into Christ's Church. It is not marvellous that it should appear, but we must meet it with the old weapons of God's Word and prayer. He has given victory to the catholic faith in the many controversies of 1800 years.

12. *One of themselves, even a prophet of their own, said, The Cretians are always liars, evil beasts, slow bellies. 13. This witness is true. Wherefore rebuke them sharply, that they may be sound in the faith ; 14. not giving heed to Jewish fables, and commandments of men, that turn from the truth.*

Here are hard words, yet spoken in love. The apostle desired the Christians in Crete to seek for substantial virtues, truth, purity, diligence, and leave off talking and dreaming, which brought little profit. He would recall us from speculation to practice. God does not ask what we know, but whether our life and faith are according to our baptismal promise.

15. *Unto the pure all things are pure : but unto them that are defiled and unbelieving is nothing pure ; but even their mind and conscience is defiled.*

Jews were apt to put purity or impurity in restraining from or using certain kinds of food, but Christians are taught by Jesus Christ Himself to look much deeper. Love renders all things pure by using them rightly, and sin renders even the best things unwholesome to the soul by using them with an evil intention. How grievous is the stain of an unclean heart ! how it corrupts all things, and finds the poison that it loves even in what is best and holiest !

16. They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate.

This is spoken of Christians who appear so only in outward profession, but whose lives are wholly in contradiction to their faith. They do not deny God in so many words, but they deny Him by living as the slaves of sin, and devoting their whole life to increasing the devil's kingdom. Here are Satan's agents professedly members of Christ's Church. What a miserable union of two things that cannot agree!

CHAPTER II.

1. Directions given unto Titus both for his doctrine and life. 9. Of the duty of servants, and in general of all Christians.

BUT speak thou the things which become sound doctrine:

Sound doctrine here means advice suited to each Christian's condition. Titus was not to confine himself to generalities, but consider each class of people intrusted to his charge, and teach them their duty. All through this Epistle we are constantly warned not to sever profession from practice. Unless our religion brings forth good fruits, there is nothing sound about it.

2. That the aged men be sober, grave, temperate, sound in faith, in charity, in patience.

Old men are reminded of the duties which befit the close of life. There is not time then to undertake any great works or display much energy of mind or body, but yet they may wait patiently and cheerfully,

“Content to live, yet not afraid to die.”

They may avoid self-indulgence, a scoffing temper, niggardliness, discontent; they still need faith and prayer.

3. The aged women likewise, that they be in behaviour as becometh holiness, not false accusers, not given to much wine, teachers of good things;

Old women are warned against giving scandal by their words or example. Where shall we learn lessons of reverence, kindness, discretion, except from aged Christian women? God reserves them to teach us who belong to another generation what our fathers believed and practised.

4. *That they may teach the young women to be sober, to love their husbands, to love their children, 5. to be discreet, chaste, keepers at home, good, obedient to their own husbands, that the word of God be not blasphemed.*

Young women may find many helpful thoughts in these two verses. They describe the peaceful, pure, wise, and diligent behaviour which will make all things at home go well. God meant our homes to be happy, and all their inmates to be joined together by a common faith and love. We have much more to unite us than the heathen had ; better teaching, loftier prayers, a brighter hope. It is shame for us if we fall below what they attained to.

6. *Young men likewise exhort to be sober minded.*

Young men must be sober in mind as well as body. This means they must strive for a serious mind, must be humble and ready to learn, must remember God and death and the world to come. The apostle does not condemn the overflowing spirits, the bright visions, the warm affections of the happy time of youth, but he throws into the sparkling cup a drop of serious thought.

7. *In all things shewing thyself a pattern of good works : in doctrine shewing uncorruptness, gravity, sincerity, 8. sound speech, that cannot be condemned ; that he that is of the contrary part may be ashamed, having no evil thing to say of you.*

Alas ! a minister of God who has to enforce all these wise counsels on his people must look at home first, and think with confusion how far he is from practising what he preaches. If he is hasty in speech, trifling or careless in behaviour, all his best sermons will signify nothing. He may far more easily affect his people for evil than for good. If the light be darkness and the rule faulty, what will become of those who learn ?

9. *Exhort servants to be obedient unto their own masters, and to please them well in all things ; not answering again ; 10. not purloining, but shewing all good fidelity ; that they may adorn the doctrine of God our Saviour in all things.*

Christian servants are trusted with the honour of their Divine Master ; they are called by His Name, they declare His praises, they attend His Table ; men will therefore judge of Him by their behaviour. If they were dishonest, quarrelsome, or vicious, His holy Name would get the blame of it. Their Lord came on earth in a humble condition, not to reverse the world's inequalities, but to put within the heart a spell that should make all duties light.

11. For the grace of God that bringeth salvation hath appeared to all men,

Once God's love was hidden, few knew of it, few even guessed at it ; but in the Incarnation of the Son of God it became visible to the world. Glory be to His mercy for bringing out into clear daylight what He is and what we ought to be. All ages, conditions, and characters are included in this heavenly message.

12. Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world ;

Here is the first baptismal promise. When we are enlisted in Christ's service we renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, and bind ourselves to a better Master. If this world were all, even then we should find it unsatisfying, but now we see so clearly its miserable bondage, its hollow emptiness, in comparison with the delights which our God offers.

13. Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ ;

Here is the second promise. We believe the holy catholic faith, which tells us of God and Christ and life everlasting. It would be hard to practise self-denial on principles of mere philosophy ; but we know now who God is, and what He has done for our redemption, and promised for our final salvation. Believing and hoping thus, we are not afraid of all the assaults of the devil.

14. Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works.

Divine majesty was outraged, Divine glory despised, perfect love and holiness treated as vile ; and all this for our sake. It needed this to cleanse our hearts. Lord, let the power of Thy saving Cross be manifested in my life ; it was for me that Thou didst win such a victory at such a cost.

15. These things speak, and exhort, and rebuke with all authority. Let no man despise thee.

A pastor should remember that he is the ambassador of Christ, and therefore must not make His Master contemptible by any fault of his own. His business is to instruct the ignorant, to encourage the weak, to comfort the distressed with Christ's own words, and as from Himself. What Jesus Christ was in the midst of this world so should His servant be. How grave, how merciful, how condescending was Jesus Christ ! Who among us comes near to His pattern ?

CHAPTER III.

2. Titus is yet further directed by Paul, both concerning the things he should teach, and not teach. 10. He is willed also to reject obstinate hereticks: 12, which done, he appointeth him both time and place, wherein he should come unto him, and so concludeth.

PUT them in mind to be subject to principalities and powers, to obey magistrates, to be ready to every good work,

Converts to the gospel needed to remember that our Saviour did not come to free us from obedience to the powers that be. His kingdom is not of this world; nay, it takes up and sanctifies this world's kingdoms, and makes obedience to them a matter of conscience. Obedience, hearty loyalty, readiness to fulfil all our duties as citizens and subjects, are marks of a true Christian.

2. To speak evil of no man, to be no brawlers, but gentle, shewing all meekness unto all men.

Yes, even giving up our rights, forbearing to vindicate ourselves, putting up with unjust words. If our God has remitted so much to us, if our Saviour has suffered so much for us, we shall not be careful to exact all the respect which men ought to pay us. Rather let us rejoice to find an opportunity of sacrificing our own feelings, and this quietly and secretly, as far as we may.

3. For we ourselves also were sometimes foolish, disobedient, deceived, serving divers lusts and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, and hating one another.

This portrait of all Adam's children, as they naturally are, is indeed too true. If we neglect our God and grow careless in His service, we might easily fall back into the same condition. The light of nature is quite insufficient to shew us what is right, or enable us to do it; help from above was needed for that.

4. But after that the kindness and love of God our Saviour toward man appeared, 5. not by works of righteousness which we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and renewing of the Holy Ghost; 6. which he shed on us abundantly through Jesus Christ our Saviour;

The Holy Trinity wrought out our salvation with Divine love and power. God the Father adopted us for His children, God the

Son redeemed us from sin, God the Holy Ghost put new life within our hearts. It is all Divine mercy, not our own merits. It is what human nature needed, but could not find. It has sufficed for eighteen centuries, and will last on unsailing till the world comes to an end.

7. That being justified by his grace, we should be made heirs according to the hope of eternal life.

This is the object and end of Redemption, to fit us for everlasting blessedness. God would have us set our heart upon heaven. Not all this world, at its best and highest, can satisfy the yearnings of God's children ; they know of something better.

8. This is a faithful saying, and these things I will that thou affirm constantly, that they which have believed in God might be careful to maintain good works. These things are good and profitable unto men.

Faith and works ; that is all the gospel. Faith without works is dead ; works without faith are hollow and empty. Pastors should strive for these two things ; one, to teach their people the pure, saving, uncorrupted faith ; and a second, to make them zealous and persevering in good works. All else is vanity. You may be sure that God will not reject you if you have true faith and good works to shew. He requires no more.

9. But avoid foolish questions, and genealogies, and contentions, and strivings about the law ; for they are unprofitable and vain.

How ingenious many people are to take the shadow and leave the substance ! They pick out of Scripture all the hard names, thorny questions, perplexing passages, and are wonderfully up in all this, but have nothing to say about Christ's love or the plain commands which He gave. Thank God, the greatest matters in religion are the easiest to find, and have the least doubtfulness in them.

10. A man that is an heretick after the first and second admonition reject ; 11. knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself.

To obey this command we must be ourselves well rooted and grounded in the catholic faith, so as to know the difference between truth and error. We must have extreme patience, so as to warn wisely and rightly. We must cling fast to Jesus Christ ourselves, so as to feel for the sad state of those who lose Him.

12. When I shall send Artemas unto thee, or Tychicus, be diligent to come unto me to Nicopolis : for I have determined

there to winter. 13. Bring Zenas the lawyer and Apollos on their journey diligently, that nothing be wanting unto them. 14. And let our's also learn to maintain good works for necessary uses, that they be not unfruitful.

All Christians, in the apostle's judgment, are to be zealous in good works ; but yet they were poor, were afflicted and despised ; all the wealth of the earth was in other hands. Nay, as long as men have time, and hands to work, and hearts to feel, they can do some good. Are there not all round us a hundred objects for sympathy and prayer and zeal ? God will supply us with means, if we desire to do His work.

15. *All that are with me salute thee. Greet them that love us in the faith. Grace be with you all. Amen.*

The tie of common faith was a very close one in those days ; there is no union like that. When two hearts have found the same Saviour, pray before the same altar, look forward to meet again in heaven, they are knit by a closer tie than the world knows of. The world's intimacies are often chance connections of fancy or interest, but our love is deeper rooted.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL TO PHILEMON.

4. He rejoiceth to hear of the faith and love of Philemon, g. whom he desireth to forgive his servant Onesimus, and lovingly to receive him again.

PAUL, a prisoner of Jesus Christ, and Timothy our brother, unto Philemon our dearly beloved, and fellowlabourer, 2. and to our beloved Apphia, and Archippus our fellow-soldier, and to the church in thy house :

S. Paul and Timothy send greetings from Rome to a household at Colosse, a town in Asia. There is Philemon the master, Apphia the mistress, Archippus their son (so it would seem), who is also a minister of Christ. There are relations, servants, and friends who meet for Divine service within those walls. This is the only one of S. Paul's private letters which has been preserved for us ; it has remained, while so many hundreds of deeply interesting letters are lost. God so ordered it, because there are some lessons it contains about masters and slaves, about forgiveness, about the effect of the gospel in reforming the world, even about the right way of asking a favour, which we could not learn so well elsewhere. Though so short, and dealing only with a private matter, it is full of love and wisdom.

3. Grace to you, and peace, from God our Father and the Lord Jesus Christ.

Think how much God has forgiven and given to you. Philemon might lose his slave, or his other property, but so long as he kept Divine grace and peace he was rich enough. Nothing but sin could rob him of those. S. Paul does not say riches and peace, health and peace, luck and peace, but grace and peace, which is the best of all combinations. Observe, too, how the apostle habitually joined together God and Christ ; they formed but one Divine Source of love in his prayers and creed, as in ours.

4. I thank my God, making mention of thee always in my prayers, 5. hearing of thy love and faith, which thou hast toward the Lord Jesus, and toward all saints;

Here S. Paul turns straight to Philemon alone, and pleads with him heart to heart. He mixes up thanks and prayers in these two verses just as he actually did when he was on his knees. Gratitude to God for His rich mercies to such and such a soul made him pray, and prayer brought down new blessings to be thankful for. In the apostle's imprisonment he heard such news as this which delighted him ; it was better than all the gossip and politics of the world.

6. That the communication of thy faith may become effectual by the acknowledging of every good thing which is in you in Christ Jesus.

Was Christian brotherhood to be a real living power of goodness, or merely a passing feeling? Do our sweet hymns and fervent prayers make us really patient, really forgiving, ready to make some sacrifices for Christ's sake? The Lord has done such great marvels for us, should we deny Him the favour which He asks, to present Him with a will wholly subject to His Divine law? S. Paul saw such good beginnings in Philemon that he longed for God to crown him with full knowledge, entire obedience.

7. For we have great joy and consolation in thy love, because the bowels of the saints are refreshed by thee, brother.

Want, and sickness, and pain, are turned into treasures by Divine grace. They turn to refreshment for the sufferer when he finds relief ; they open the heart of those who grieve for pain ; they give an opportunity of doing good to those who can supply help. Just as the healing art makes remedies out of poisons, so God's grace turns persecutions, hunger, disease, misery, into steps towards everlasting joy.

8. Wherefore, though I might be much bold in Christ to enjoin thee that which is convenient, 9. yet for love's sake I rather beseech thee, being such an one as Paul the aged, and now also a prisoner of Jesus Christ.

S. Paul's authority, and his personal claim to obedience, were multiplied by his imprisonment. What he had endured gave him a great right over hearts. The children of this world oppressed him, and that made the children of God love him the more. The liberty which he had lost without he gained within. His way always was to prevail by love rather than authority. How peacefully our affairs would go on if we always tried the same plan before resorting to harsh orders or threats !

10. I beseech thee for my son Onesimus, whom I have begotten in my bonds :

The great apostle had converted this runaway slave, taught him the way of salvation, turned him into a dear friend and spiritual son. The gospel was not too great to take notice of one such soul. What light and comfort slaves must have found in hearing of the Lord Jesus Who came to make us free, and restore us all to be God's children and heirs of heaven !

11. Which in time past was to thee unprofitable, but now profitable to thee and to me :

Onesimus would be a faithful servant, now that he was a Christian. That is the secret of doing our duty well, to do it as God's children and Christ's brethren should. How well all affairs would go on if they were in the hands of true Christians, who abhorred selfishness, dishonesty, and deceit, and thought only how to please God and profit men ! O Lord, if I have been a very unprofitable servant so far, yet let Thy mercy make my latter days more useful than the former have been.

12. Whom I have sent again : thou therefore receive him, that is, mine own bowels :

S. Paul calls this humble friend his very heart. No difference of age or condition prevented this mutual love. What a reproach this is for those who treat their inferiors with coldness ! If God has made, and Christ has redeemed a soul, that suffices to raise it to an infinite value. There are capacities of everlasting love in it.

13. Whom I would have retained with me, that in thy stead he might have ministered unto me in the bonds of the gospel : 14. but without thy mind would I do nothing ; that thy benefit should not be as it were of necessity, but willingly.

Instead of Philemon having to give up his claim to his servant, through S. Paul's keeping him for his own service, which would have been a favour rendered under compulsion, he is now asked to shew the favour another way, by forgiving and kindly treating him on his return. We may learn from S. Paul lessons of courtesy and discretion. He never presumes, he never stands on his rights. How lasting would our friendships be if such a spirit prevailed in them !

15. For perhaps he therefore departed for a season, that thou shouldest receive him for ever ;

It was not long since he ran away, but what a change had been wrought in him ! He was a reprobate, now he is a faithful Chris-

tian. He was a mere slave with nothing but this life before him ; now he is a brother in Christ, with eternity to look forward to. Surely God had overruled his fault, had allowed it for such great ends.

16. Not now as a servant, but above a servant, a brother beloved, specially to me, but how much more unto thee, both in the flesh, and in the Lord ?

Philemon was not told he must emancipate Onesimus. The gospel did not upset domestic relations between master and slave. Christian slaves stopped in their place and obeyed their master as before ; but yet the axe is here put to the root of slavery. When slaves are treated as brethren in Christ, as sharers in one hope of heaven, one redeeming love, there you may be sure the institution is ready to disappear. God's dear mercy has done much in this nineteenth century to abolish slavery from the earth. May He go on to complete His work.

17. If thou count me therefore a partner, receive him as myself.

Onesimus had been already called S. Paul's son, his friend, his brother, and his dear heart ; now he is called the apostle's second self. S. Paul almost takes up the very words of the Lord Jesus, and says, " Whatsoever you do to one of the least of mine, you do it unto me." He had not forgotten the heavenly words heard on the Damascus road, which first brought home to his mind the thought of communion between Christ and His members.

18. If he hath wronged thee, or oweth thee ought, put that on mine account ; 19. I Paul have written it with mine own hand, I will repay it : albeit I do not say to thee how thou owest unto me even thine own self besides.

Whatever Onesimus owed his master, Philemon owed S. Paul much more. His very self, his new life, his hopes of heaven, all hung on what S. Paul had taught him. What was a debt, or a theft of property, in comparison with such treasures as these ? If we compare earthly and heavenly loss and gain, we shall see the true value of each. How much we owe to those whose teaching and example has made us believers !

20. Yea, brother, let me have joy of thee in the Lord : refresh my bowels in the Lord.

In verse 7 he had said that all Christian hearts were refreshed by Philemon's kindness ; now he begs that he himself may not be left out. What Philemon had done for others he must do for Paul also now that he comes to beg a favour. And all this asking, and

giving, and receiving is “in the Lord,” for the sake of our Divine Friend, our heavenly Master, Who bought us at so dear a price.

21. Having confidence in thy obedience I wrote unto thee, knowing that thou wilt also do more than I say.

Let this spirit of obedience be ours ; let us be ready to anticipate the orders of those who are over us, and, above all, the commands of our dear Lord, and fulfil them with all our hearts. This is the way of happiness, to be ready and willing to obey. No one who reads this letter can doubt that Philemon joyfully fulfilled S. Paul’s request, and gave his servant the welcome that the apostle bade him give.

22. But withhold prepare me also a lodging : for I trust that through your prayers I shall be given unto you.

To have the great apostle in his house would be a sufficient reward to Philemon for his ready compliance with the request contained in the letter. No doubt he received him joyfully, as Zaccheus did our Saviour when his house was honoured with such a Guest. When we welcome Christ’s poor to what we have, when we receive the signs of Christ’s Sacred Body and Blood, we are ourselves privileged to entertain the King of Glory. He enters our poor house, nay, our heart, and dwells there.

23. There salute thee Epaphras, my fellowprisoner in Christ Jesus ; 24. Marcus, Aristarchus, Demas, Lucas, my fellow-labourers.

What renown, to be handed down to after ages as having suffered and toiled by the side of S. Paul ! Epaphras, no doubt, was thinking of his friends at Colosse (Col. iv. 12). Mark and Luke were, perhaps, beginning to prepare their Divine gospels ; or if the latter was writing out the Acts, then no doubt Aristarchus, who had shared S. Paul’s shipwreck and many of his journeys, was helping him. Of Demas we know little, but only this, that all the prayers, the hopes, the victories, the comforts that this holy society offered were not enough to keep him in it long (2 Tim. iv. 10).

25. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit. Amen.

This letter is full of the prayers which S. Paul made to Philemon ; now here he gives the prayer that he made for Philemon. What he was asked to surrender to the apostle was little compared to what the apostle won from God for him.

THE EPISTLE OF PAUL THE APOSTLE TO THE HEBREWS.

CHAPTER I.

1. Christ in these last times coming to us from the Father, is preferred above the angels, both in person and office.

GOD, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets,

This verse is a brief account of the Old Testament. God spoke then, yet not so clearly or so fully as He does in Christ. His speaking was in many times or parts, Moses had some things to say of Him, Isaiah others, Daniel others, each a portion only of truth; and it was in divers manners, now by dreams, now by angels, now by inspired thoughts, now by glorious visions, God being manifested now in one way, now in another. I delight, in reading the Old Testament, to trace the gradual unfolding of God's wise plan to raise mankind.

2. *Hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds;*

Here we come to the gospel; not the prophets now, but God's own Son; not dreams and visions, but God manifest as a man amongst men, speaking the "dear words of human speech," all His awful glory laid aside for a while. I trace in the words of Jesus the wisdom of Him by Whom all things were made. The world of nature and the world of grace proceed from one Author; their mysteries, their fears, their hopes, are akin to each other.

3. *Who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high;*

Here we have the middle part of the Creed ; He Who is God of God and Light of Light, yet for our salvation suffered, was crucified, and died ; He rose again and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of God. Think Who it was Who died for you ; not a good man only, but One from above, a Divine Friend. Can anything undo the reconciliation so wrought ? Infinite power and love and truth are pledged to save you ; not all your own frailty, nor the darkness of life or death can tear you from Him, if you will but consent to remain His.

4. Being made so much better than the angels, as he hath by inheritance obtained a more excellent name than they.

No angel could have helped us. They are servants of God as we are, but we know nothing of their nature ; they feel for us, yet have to stand apart. So the Eternal One stepped forth into His own world, took our poor nature and carried it through life and death, and into glory. It is comforting, and yet almost awful, to reflect that God's own Son took a mind and a body like mine, and did such things with it.

5. For unto which of the angels said he at any time, Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee ? And again, I will be to him a Father, and he shall be to me a Son ?

Christ the Lord was begotten to live five several lives : one was from all eternity in the bosom of His Father ; a second was in the Virgin's womb, to be man for our sakes ; a third was from the grave, to reign in glory ; a fourth, spiritually, in the Sacrament of His love, where Faith finds Him ; and a fifth and last, to take up His abode in the believer's heart, never to leave it. Unless God's dear Son is thus with us and in us, what true life can we have ? Our mortality can be quickened only by His Divine life.

6. And again, when he bringeth in the firstbegotten into the world, he saith, And let all the angels of God worship him.

Our best worship of heart and body is due to Christ. He is the angels' Lord and ours too. The boldest and freest spirits can find help, not hindrance, in adoring their true Master. Worship means duty, obedience, lowly reverence. It is not merely bowing at the sacred Name, nor proclaiming it in creeds, nor singing it in hymns, but it is the heart's submission to One Who has the best right over it.

7. And of the angels he saith, Who maketh his angels spirits, and his ministers a flame of fire.

Winds and storms are in our Father's hands ; His unseen messengers guide them. Men can only hear the storm roaring, or see the lightning flash. All seems like terrible chance sporting with our

frail lives ; but our Father designs it all in mercy. Let me remember in any storm that all this which seems so frightful is but my heavenly Father's ordering ; it cannot hurt a hair of my head unless He wills it so for my greater good. Let me remember His unseen armies set round to guard me.

8. But unto the Son he saith, Thy throne, O God, is for ever and ever : a sceptre of righteousness is the sceptre of thy kingdom.

Earthly crowns fade, kingdoms break up, the glory of earth's greatest monarchs is soon gone, and while it lasted there were many stains on it. The kingdom of Christ my Lord endures over true souls from generation to generation. His soldiers still die for His sake, overthrow His enemies, win crowns for Him ; His laws are still administered ; His palace stands open. I know where to find His Presence and throne.

9. Thou hast loved righteousness, and hated iniquity ; therefore God, even thy God, hath anointed thee with the oil of gladness above thy fellows.

This is our Pattern as well as our King. Many sovereigns on earth have been in their own character poor and vile, though set so high ; but we have no feeling but love for our glorified King. His life on earth was a protest against wrong, and He now lives on to help the right to conquer in us. Christ had first the cup of suffering, then the oil of gladness. His order was so, and we, if we love good and hate evil, will find it the same for ourselves.

10. And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth ; and the heavens are the works of thine hands : 11. they shall perish ; but thou remainest ; and they all shall wax old as doth a garment ; 12. and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed : but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail.

All else changes and passes away, but Christ our Lord remains. This world with its beauty and its love and its terror will soon have disappeared. The hills and trees outlast us, but they too yield to time after a while. What can we cling to for refuge amidst the flood of change but to Him Who alone lasts, and Who has in His Divine Son stepped forth into the world of time to give us a glimpse of eternity ? If I am at peace with God through a firm faith in Christ, I have a share in immortality ; I can despise death and time ; eternal ages will not wear out God's love to me.

13. But to which of the angels said he at any time, Sit on my right hand, until I make thine enemies thy footstool ?

Christ will triumph with us or upon us. Either our wills will be lost in His, and our whole nature subdued to love and obey Him, or we shall see ourselves, with infinite shame and confusion, overthrown by His awful judgment. If we were to rebel, it would only turn to work out His Will. Our dearest wishes must be given up now to be set under His feet, if He requires it. Thus we shall conquer at last and share His triumph.

14. Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for them who shall be heirs of salvation ?

God in His mercy has made me an heir of salvation, has set His angel guards to rejoice over my conversion and watch my steps. They wonder at what God has done for me, how He has become my Brother, my Pattern, and my Food. He did not do such marvels for them. If I degrade by sin that nature which Christ has redeemed and made His own, how monstrous my angel friends must think me ! What a fool I should be to throw away all the great prospects which Almighty God has set before me !

CHAPTER II.

1. We ought to be obedient to Christ Jesus, 5. and that because he vouchsafed to take our nature upon him, 14. as it was necessary.

THHEREFORE we ought to give the more earnest heed to the things which we have heard, lest at any time we should let them slip.

Awake, and think where you are. God has spoken to you, has wrought salvation for you, has made you an heir of it ; your body is His temple, your life His service. Have not your ears grown dull since you were first taught these great truths? God judges us by our opportunities. Heathens heard little of His message, Jews only a part ; but we have learnt the gospel with all its heights and depths of Divine love. Our responsibility therefore is a serious one. How easy it is to forget holy lessons and brave resolves !

2. For if the word spoken by angels was stedfast, and every transgression and disobedience received a just recompence of reward ;

The ancient law was stern ; it spoke in grave warnings, and denounced death on those who broke it. God punished rebels with sudden, awful judgments, in old time. His wrath was more manifested than His love. All this is not without its terror to serious

persons ; they see what consequences disobedience brings ; they notice in Scripture and in the world around how many ruin themselves utterly by their own fault.

3. How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation; which at the first began to be spoken by the Lord, and was confirmed unto us by them that heard him ;

Christ the Lord was the first preacher of His gospel. He was pleased to begin the evangelical ministry Himself, when He appointed it for the salvation of mankind ; and He did not disappear from earth till He had prepared His friends to execute it after Him. Jesus, when He preached salvation, spoke very plainly, very tenderly, dealt with the simple, was accessible to all ; yet He spoke gravely about the world to come, and thundered against unrighteousness. He and His disciples speak to us from God ; their witness is confirmed by our hearts' answer.

4. God also bearing them witness, both with signs and wonders, and with divers miracles, and gifts of the Holy Ghost, according to his own will ?

Lord, I believe. I thank Thee for the manifold proofs with which Thou hast strengthened my weak faith. The gospel has subdued life and overcome death, sustained sufferers in the worst ills, and either brought rescue here or a sure hope of eternal deliverance. In it are gifts of purity and hope and peace, which the wisdom of this world could not give.

5. For unto the angels hath he not put in subjection the world to come, whereof we speak.

Not to angels, but to Christ. He is the Lord of redeemed mankind. How long shall we remain in bondage to sin, instead of living in peaceful and happy subjection to our true Lord ? All creatures would find their happiness in obeying Christ our Saviour. He is above all, yet able to win our love. Not only did He make us, but He has worn our mortal body, and knows our condition.

6. But one in a certain place testified, saying, What is man, that thou art mindful of him ? or the son of man, that thou visitest him ? 7. Thou madest him a little lower than the angels ; thou crownedst him with glory and honour, and didst set him over the works of thy hands :

Frail man, by his body akin to the beasts that perish, is yet raised up by God's mercy, and made able to adore his Maker. God has poured upon men treasures of knowledge, love, and hope. He has made our weakness the object of His tender care. The other

works of God may be wonderful, but none so reflect His goodness as mankind does. O dear Lord, why do so many throw away all this glory, and live like the beasts that perish? They descend from their place in creation, and despise all Thy goodness.

8. Thou hast put all things in subjection under his feet. For in that he put all in subjection under him, he left nothing that is not put under him. But now we see not yet all things put under him.

Man is a disrowned sovereign, the creatures rebel against him, his own mind and body are disobedient; sin rules and makes man a slave. Where is all the glory gone that his Maker designed? Scripture and reason attribute to mankind a high dignity, but we feel in ourselves that a terrible downfall has taken place. Nay, be comforted; there is one Man, the Son of Mary, in Whom all is in perfect order. He has restored our nature to its true place. He gives us a hope of rising to our true seat.

9. But we see Jesus, who was made a little lower than the angels for the suffering of death, crowned with glory and honour; that he by the grace of God should taste death for every man.

When we come to taste the bitter cup of death we shall be helped by remembering that Jesus drank of it before us. He shews us that love can overcome death. He reminds us of the fulness of God's mercy, which can wash away all our sins. It was the poison of sin which first brought death into the world, but we have found a Physician Who has dropt an antidote into the cup, and so takes its worst effects away.

10. For it became him, for whom are all things, and by whom are all things, in bringing many sons unto glory, to make the captain of their salvation perfect through sufferings.

Our Captain led on His followers. There was no danger or pain for them but He would face it first. The great army of redeemed humanity press on after Him, ready to dare and suffer after His example. The way of perfection was through the Cross for Him as for us. Shall we lose heart utterly under pain, if we bear in mind that God has no other way for us now to gain heaven but this one, steep and rough though it seems?

11. For both he that sanctifieth and they who are sanctified are all of one: for which cause he is not ashamed to call them brethren,

God's Son condescended to our level. He was not ashamed to join

mankind, though we are fallen creatures, full of sin and misery. In order to bring us back to God He stepped down among us, and lived our life patiently. Shall we be proud and cold, and think ourselves too good to feel for those beneath us? That would not be after the pattern which Christ has set. He is not ashamed of us. He went through infinite pain and shame to heal us.

12. *Saying, I will declare thy name unto my brethren, in the midst of the church will I sing praise unto thee.*

We are made Christ's brethren in order to know God's Name and praise Him aright. This was our Saviour's object, to multiply the number of God's true worshippers. He knew that it is our fullest happiness to be acquainted with God, so He set Himself the task of Redemption, in order to gather together a great company of believers from all parts of the world, all ages and conditions. It is our high calling to be members of the Church, and able to praise God therein.

13. *And again, I will put my trust in him. And again, Behold I and the children which God hath given me.*

My Saviour Himself, as man, has known dependence. He had to wrestle with fear and doubt, and overcome them. He has knit us to Himself by the tie of human weakness. Lord, grant me that, in dark hours, I may not utterly lose my trust in Thee. I am one of the children whom Thou hast begotten to a new life; let me not feel it die out of my heart.

14. *Forasmuch then as the children are partakers of flesh and blood, he also himself likewise took part of the same; that through death he might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil;*

Flesh and blood are so frail, they are subject to such weakness, share in so many miseries, so soon perish. There is also a mighty enemy set against us, the devil with all his sinful hosts. Yet God's wisdom chose the weak to overcome the strong. He clothed Himself with our poor weak nature to enter on the fight with the evil one. God's ways are marvellous; He took our low estate and dealt a deadly blow at Satan from it. Remember that humility is God's way of winning victories; patience and sympathy can do more than strength.

15. *And deliver them who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage.*

Mankind were shut up in the close prison of this fallen world; the executioner, Death, came day by day, and chose some one to be slaughtered, and the other poor criminals knew that their turn

would soon come. There was no hope, no escape ; the prison walls were strong, the place grew more wretched day by day, the terrible sword came nearer and nearer. Ah ! now the Lord Jesus has been here ; the prison is only a room to wait in, or a school to learn our lessons in for a while, and the executioner is become a kind friend to tell us the King has sent for us to His glorious palace.

16. For verily he took not on him the nature of angels ; but he took on him the seed of Abraham.

The angels had no Saviour, no Atonement, no process of purification ; they stood or fell, their probation was over at once. But God pursues a different plan with mankind. Here there has been a long process of recovery, a Mediator and a Sacrifice, a discipline of trial. Divine wisdom dealt with us in great patience, making us by slow degrees fit to inherit the kingdom.

17. Wherefore in all things it behoved him to be made like unto his brethren, that he might be a merciful and faithful high priest in things pertaining to God, to make reconciliation for the sins of the people.

Christ came to bring us back to God ; His appointed work was to restore our fallen race ; therefore He took our nature in its first elements, and lived our life and died our death, so as to speak from us to God, and make us feel that God had come near again to us. Our sins hid God's face, but God sent one Man, Who is also His own Son, to unveil the Divine mercy. I know that the Incarnation and Atonement are mysterious, my reason cannot exhaust their depths, but my heart feels that peace and truth and hope are here.

18. For in that he himself hath suffered being tempted, he is able to succour them that are tempted.

Fiery temptations surround us ; how shall our weak souls stand ? We need more sympathy and help than any human friend can give. Nay, there is One Who has been tempted as we are, and yet remained perfectly pure. He knows our weakness, and yet does not despise us as an earthly friend might if we unveiled our heart to him. Lord, in hours of temptation which come upon us, strengthen our frail hearts by the remembrance of Thy victory. Thou canst help us where all other help fails.

CHAPTER III.

1. Christ is more worthy than Moses, 7. therefore if we believe not him, we shall be more worthy punishment than hardhearted Israel.

WHENCEFORE, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our profession, Christ Jesus;

Christ is our Apostle as sent on God's part to us, and our High Priest as bearing our wants up to God. All other ministers are but instruments in His hands. He teaches us and offers for us by their means. Let us learn not to depend over much on earthly teachers; they may go astray, or change, or leave us, but our dear Lord's words stand sure, and His Sacrifice is eternally acceptable. Christians who listen to Him and plead His Sacrifice daily will never be without a guide.

2. Who was faithful to him that appointed him, as also Moses was faithful in all his house.

Let me in all I have to do be a faithful servant. God is my Master, and He has committed certain work to my care. Moses had no higher praise than this, that he was a faithful servant. Even Christ Himself earned the same praise of faithfulness. God's house is great, and He employs many servants in earth and heaven. Let it be my delight to be in the service of so good a Master, Who will assuredly reward those who serve Him faithfully.

3. For this man was counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as he who hath builded the house hath more honour than the house. 4. For every house is builded by some man; but he that built all things is God.

God sent His servant Moses to build and fit up the Jewish Church, then His Son Christ Jesus to found the far better tabernacle of the Christian Church. Both alike were constructed for the time and circumstances in which they appeared. Our God, Who has made the natural world full of beauty and order, would not leave man's spirit without a fitting dwelling-place.

5. And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after;

Moses set up faithfully the pattern of heavenly things. God did

not let him see the promised land, nor enjoy the blessings of the gospel, in his lifetime. He received God's orders and obeyed them, yet wandered in the desert and served types and shadows. Long after death he saw Christ in glory, and the promises came true ; all was explained then.

6. But Christ as a son over his own house ; whose house are we, if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm unto the end.

We seem to wander in the desert, yet are really at home. Christ is ours and we are His. Let no trials upset our confidence in His saving Presence and our hope of winning everlasting joy. The Israelites had the Divine glory overshadowing the Mercy-seat, but Christ our Lord in His Word and Sacraments is nearer and mightier to save. Hold fast this faith, and it will uphold you in the worst days.

7. Wherefore (as the Holy Ghost saith, To day if ye will hear his voice, 8. harden not your hearts, as in the provocation, in the day of temptation in the wilderness : 9. when your fathers tempted me, proved me, and saw my works forty years. 10. Wherefore I was grieved with that generation, and said, They do alway err in their heart ; and they have not known my ways. 11. So I swear in my wrath, They shall not enter into my rest.)

We all know well the *Venite* with which the Church opens the Psalms of every day. It begins by inviting us to praise God in His house with gratitude and love, then it ends with sadder strains of warning, reminding Christians how their Jewish forefathers missed God's promises. It is not enough to praise God when all the church are singing, not enough to bow down reverently in moments of devotion. He bids us hear His voice all day ; we must beware when the days of temptation and provocation come, lest we who are God's redeemed people forget His law. Ah ! it is easy to "sing unto the Lord" on Sunday, but what we want is to keep our ears open to the voice amidst the world's temptations. His rest is beautiful and glorious beyond words ; what lasting home have we if we miss that ?

12. Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living God.

We are God's new Israel redeemed from Egypt, travelling through this world's desert to our heavenly home, yet we still have to take heed ; the warning strains of the Psalm are addressed to us no less than to the literal Israel. We have the terrible power of casting off our Redeemer. Our God is living and true, and has

come closer to us in the Person of His dear Son than He did as the covenant God of Israel. To depart from Him is to give up all chance of good.

13. But exhort one another daily, while it is called To day ; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin.

Every Sunday morning in the year except Easter Day we sing the words, "To-day, if ye will hear His voice ;" the warning to Israel, their dangers and their fall, are brought before us. Temptations beset us daily as they did the Jews. God speaks, and shews to us marvels and terrors as He did to them. Those are blessed who persevere and reach the edge of Jordan without having fallen away. For them the desert journey is over, and the entrance sure into the land of peace.

14. For we are made partakers of Christ, if we hold the beginning of our confidence stedfast unto the end ;

What Christ has won is ours too, if we only will hold fast to Him. How foolish we should be to lose all the glory that is within our reach ! Only persevere for a little while against doubts and scoffs and temptations, keep stedfast, and your Lord will appear and make you a partaker of His glorious kingdom. What can sinners promise you to compare with this ? You would not really be as happy for this life as true Christians are, and you would miss eternity.

15. While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation.

Let the *Venite* sound in our ears as a warning as well as an invitation. Many respond to its invitation to worship the Lord our Maker who forgot to notice its grave conclusion. Let the fiery pillar, the glory on the Mercy-seat, the awful judgments of God upon transgressors in old time, remind us that He is near now, though unseen. He as little approves irreverence in His house as He did in those days.

16. For some, when they had heard, did provoke : howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses.

Redeemed hearts often turn back to Egypt ; we wish that we were free to live as the heathen, and follow our own hearts' lusts. Ah ! has God's service no delights ? The seeming pleasures of sin which tempt us so strongly are unsatisfying, and soon turn to bitterness. Keep us, Lord, from turning back in our fancy to the ways of sin, make us see that the desert with Thee is better than the house of bondage.

17. But with whom was he grieved forty years ? was it not

with them that had sinned, whose carcases fell in the wilderness?

We grieve God's mercy by our lives ; our path is bordered on every side by terrible examples. There are Christians who were brought up in purity, but now have become Satan's slaves, who once attended God's altar, but now despise it, who believed and trusted once, but now laugh at the hopes of believers.

18. And to whom soever he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not ?

We despise the heavenly rest, and set our hopes on this perishing world. Lord, give us grace to keep ever before our eyes Thy promises of a better land. Then, as we draw near to the grave, we shall still have comfort and strength ; darkness will not overtake us wholly, for we shall see some bright gleams from our true country. How sad and dreary is old age if no brightness from beyond the grave shines upon it !

19. So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

Unbelief turns us into slaves again, takes us back to Egypt, bars the doors of Canaan against our entrance. Unbelief weakens our hands in the fight, then the hosts of sin beat us down, and the dangers of the way wear out our courage. Lord, revive in us a living faith in Thy Word ; we can bear all temptations or trials cheerfully, so long as faith burns bright in our inmost soul.

CHAPTER IV.

- 1. The rest of Christians is attained by faith. 12. The power of God's word. 14. By our high priest Jesus the Son of God, subject to infirmities, but not sin, 16. we must and may go boldly to the throne of grace.*

LE^T us therefore fear, lest, a promise being left us of entering into his rest, any of you should seem to come short of it.

God has given us a promise of heaven. We do not forget any one's promise to pay us so many sovereigns, or give us a pleasant holiday ; no need to remind us about such promises as those. Why, then, are we so heedless of the great promises which our heavenly Friend has made ? His Word stands sure, He is able to fulfil it. All this world's advantages and pleasures put at our

feet would be nothing compared to what God has promised to them that love Him.

2. For unto us was the gospel preached, as well as unto them: but the word preached did not profit them, not being mixed with faith in them that heard it.

When good nourishment does not profit a sick person we begin to despair of his state. What can do him good if his food fails to nourish him? This is sometimes the case with our souls; we have means of grace, heavenly food plentifully supplied, but we receive it without faith, and so are none the better. We remain weak and cold in spite of all God's efforts for our good. We need not only to take the bread from heaven, but inwardly digest it, and so grow strong.

3. For we which have believed do enter into rest, as he said, As I have sworn in my wrath, if they shall enter into my rest: although the works were finished from the foundation of the world. 4. For he spake in a certain place of the seventh day on this wise, And God did rest the seventh day from all his works. 5. And in this place again, If they shall enter into my rest.

God's rest spoken of in the Psalm *Venite* cannot mean the Sabbath rest after the world was made, for that had come long ago, after the six great days in which this marvellous world was brought into being. Nor can it mean the peaceful settlement in Canaan of the Israelites under Joshua, for that also had taken place long ago when the Psalm was written. There is a deeper rest and a fuller promise open to God's people. All mortal life is like the days of creation, full of stir and growth, but it will be followed by eternity, which is like the Sabbath-day in Paradise.

6. Seeing therefore it remaineth that some must enter therein, and they to whom it was first preached entered not in because of unbelief: 7. again, he limiteth a certain day, saying in David, To day, after so long a time; as it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts.

The history of Exodus is over long ago, and yet in a sense it continues still. When we read of the desert journey, its dangers and downfalls, of the law given on the Mount, of the long, dreary wanderings, of the land of promise entered at last, it is ourselves of whom we read. To-day God speaks in thunder, to-day the manna falls, to-day the Midianites tempt us, perhaps to-day the waters of Jordan have to be crossed. Lord, give us grace to hear Thy call to-day, lest we lose our way in the wilderness, and never get to our home.

8. For if Jesus had given them rest, then would he not afterward have spoken of another day.

Jesus here means Joshua, not Christ our Lord. He was a saviour, yet only from earthly foes. He set twelve stones on the bank of Jordan, but Christ chose twelve apostles. He came after Moses had finished his work, yet it is our Jesus Who has really fulfilled the law and obtained the promises. Joshua's victorious sword represents to us a Christian's victory, by his Master's help, over the world, the flesh, and the devil. True rest can only come by overcoming sin first.

9. There remaineth therefore a rest to the people of God.

O happy rest, where divisions, persecutions, losses, will all be over ! yet it is for God's people, not for those who love the world. Do not be afraid of working hard here below, you will have all eternity to rest in. This world gives space for work, and for strife, and for progress, and for hope, but not much room for rest. That must come elsewhere.

10. For he that is entered into his rest, he also hath ceased from his own works, as God did from his.

Now the Church is militant, but one day it will be at peace for ever. Heaven will be very different from earth. No doubt God will employ us there according to His wisdom, but yet such things as struggle, danger, and failure will be unknown. The great Sabbath rest of the creation spoken of in Genesis is a figure of the perfection which He designs for His faithful servants. We shall look back on this life as travellers do on the stormy sea that they have crossed.

11. Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest, lest any man fall after the same example of unbelief.

Let the history of faithless Israel profit us. We may by God's grace press onward along the road to Sion, overcome Amalekites and Canaanites, withstand drought and heat and the dangers of the way, pass safely through the river, and find rest in the happy land,

“ Long loved, long tried, long spared as they,
Unlike in this alone,
That by Thy grace our hearts shall stay
For evermore Thine own ! ”

12. For the word of God is quick, and powerful, and sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a dis- cerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart.

Human laws concern outward crimes only, and then often fail of their execution, but God's judgments have to do with our inward state. His eye sees through us, He knows His servants from rebels. My God, I tremble when I consider of what kind are my thoughts, how vile, how conceited, how silly they are. All lies open to Thine all-searching eye. Let me recur frequently to Thy written Word, and keep good thoughts drawn from thence in my mind to sweeten all else that is there.

13. Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight : but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do.

This verse is very comforting for those who are blamed wrongly. One day the truth will come out ; God knows they are innocent, even if all men are against them now. But it is full of awe for sinners. It is not hard to deceive men, but the Eternal Judge can see through all deceits. We shall stand each of us before His judgment-seat to answer for ourselves. How shall I endure that day, "quum vix justus sit securus" !

14. Seeing then that we have a great high priest, that is passed into the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold fast our profession.

The Lord Jesus is not only "our Moses out of sight," but our Aaron too. He not only brings down the new law, and bids us follow Him bravely into the land of promise, but He has offered a sacrifice for us, and pleads it daily for our sins. He takes our poor offerings, unites them with His own, and so makes them acceptable to God. Our Prophet and Priest are both one ; and though He has passed into the heavens, yet He left the door open for us to have access to His Presence.

15. For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities ; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin.

This is why Jesus feels for us ; He still remembers the days of His mortal life, how He endured temptation, fought against the evil one's suggestions, had to bear pain and rebuke, and even death, sooner than flatter sin. He had a body and mind like ours, and kept both in entire submission to duty. Dear Lord, our temptations are so sharp that we sometimes despair, we cannot always stand upright ; do Thou succour us by the remembrance of Thy spotless purity.

16. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace,

that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need.

What else do we want but these two gifts, mercy for our past transgressions, and grace to serve God for the time to come? Jesus is now seated on His Throne of Grace, ready to receive us, and most willing to pardon us. Let us go to Him now while the day of grace lasts, lest we only behold Him seated on His Throne of Judgment, and find too late that our time for repentance is gone.

CHAPTER V.

- i. **The authority and honour of our Saviour's priesthood. ii. Negligence in the knowledge thereof is reproved.**

FOR every high priest taken from among men is ordained for men in things pertaining to God, that he may offer both gifts and sacrifices for sins:

This character of a high priest refers literally to the old dispensation, in which the high priest in the temple was a figure of Christ our Lord; but it has many lessons for Christian ministers also who are priests of the new law because they share in Christ's priesthood. Their occupation has to do with things pertaining to God; they are chosen from among their brethren to pray for sinners and bring about their reconciliation. If their interests are wholly of this world, if they have little care to convert souls, if they forget their holy calling, they throw their priesthood away.

2. **Who can have compassion on the ignorant, and on them that are out of the way; for that he himself also is compassed with infirmity.**

Christian priests must feel this now as much as did the high priest of old. We are indeed compassed with infirmity, our holiest thoughts so fleeting, our best works so poor, our purity so stained. When we think of our own opportunities and graces, compared with those of the ignorant, and recognise the miserable use we have made of them, it is enough to make us very forbearing with our brethren.

3. **And by reason hereof he ought, as for the people, so also for himself, to offer for sins.**

The priest's word, as well as the people's, should be, "We have erred and strayed from Thy ways like lost sheep." How will the people seek earnestly for mercy, be zealous in good deeds, offer fervently

the memorial sacrifice of Christ's Body and Blood, unless they see their pastor forward in all this himself? If he has a deep sense of his own unworthiness God will employ his means to convert many souls. Thank God, Christ's one Sacrifice, which the Church pleads, has infinite power; it can blot out all sins, both of priests and people, if they sincerely repent.

4. And no man taketh this honour unto himself, but he that is called of God, as was Aaron.

Our calling must be of God. A Christian pastor who has entered on his work for motives wholly of this world will find his way beset with difficulties. The only strength amidst suspicion, deadly temptations, cares and anxieties without end, fruitless labours, is to feel that we undertook such a work at God's bidding, that He called us, assigned our work, overlooks us, and will one day reward His true servants. Those who become priests for the honour, gains, or influence of such a calling, miss something that they can never recall.

5. So also Christ glorified not himself to be made an high priest; but he that said unto him, Thou art my Son, to day have I begotten thee. 6. As he saith also in another place, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

Christ our Saviour is the true Priest. His Word saves, His Sacrifice atones, His blessing is effectual. Levitical priests were but a shadow, Christian priests but represent Him, and are His instruments. He is our Priest as God's Son, and as newborn from the dead to a heavenly life. If we are not God's children, and living a new life after His pattern, our likeness to Him fails altogether. Let priests not look for glory from men, nay, rather welcome contempt and dislike; these will not hurt them if God gives them inward glory.

7. Who in the days of his flesh, when he had offered up prayers and supplications with strong crying and tears unto him that was able to save him from death, and was heard in that he feared;

Here is our High Priest beginning His Sacrifice. He has to offer Himself as a victim. His way is through tears and agony, presently through shame and death. He is alone in the darkness of the garden, encompassed by human fears, with no one to sympathise. Dear brethren, we who are priests must learn from this awful example the need of earnest prayer, of deep self-abasement, of lonely hours, of many trials, if we would share in our Master's saving work. The priesthood of Christ only brought Him honour after tears and darkness.

8. Though he were a Son, yet learned he obedience by the things which he suffered;

God's children often have to learn obedience in the school of suffering. Christ Himself as Man was taught there. Suffering is not thrown away ; it prints deep in our hearts the truth that this world is nothing, but that God is our only refuge. "Not my will, but Thine be done" was in Christ's lesson-book, and He repeated it over and over till He grew perfect. What else shall we do when our hour of pain comes ?

9. And being made perfect, he became the author of eternal salvation unto all them that obey him;

The mount of agony became the mount of glory on Ascension-day. Christ entered heaven at the head of His faithful servants, and they follow Him by the same road. First came the Agony and the Cross, then everlasting peace. O my God ! I know that I am far from having learnt this lesson of obedience, I am not fit to share in Thy triumph yet. Grant, I beseech Thee, that all adversities and sorrows that I have to pass through may enable me to obey Thee better.

10. Called of God an high priest after the order of Melchisedec.

This is our true Priest, Whom God Himself has ordained to make offering for us, and give us blessing. Levitical priests were shadows that passed away. Christian priests can only commemorate and apply His work, not do it themselves. Here we all find One Who can sympathise with us, can teach us, can take our sins away. His offering still remains mighty to save.

11. Of whom we have many things to say, and hard to be uttered, seeing ye are dull of hearing.

If the sacred writer found Christians dull of hearing in those days, when they were suffering persecution for Christ's sake, and He had so recently risen, and the Holy Spirit's gifts so abounded, what would He say of us ? I fear we are much slower to read God's Word, and much duller to understand it than anybody was then. Let us awake, lest the world's enchanted air lull us into a heavy slumber with no waking. God speaks ; we should listen and take in His Words.

12. For when for the time ye ought to be teachers, ye have need that one teach you again which be the first principles of the oracles of God ; and are become such as have need of milk, and not of strong meat.

God has been so long teaching me my Catechism, and yet I fear I have not learnt it aright. Here are some first principles I ought to have got hold of long ago : not to cherish foul thoughts, not to be conceited, to say my prayers regularly, to do my work diligently, to spend my time well. Alas ! I fear I am still at A B C. When shall I get beyond these, so as to love God earnestly and see the depths of His Word ? I am always breaking down over the first beginnings of the Christian life.

13. *For every one that useth milk is unskilful in the word of righteousness : for he is a babe.*

There are two sorts of childhood in spiritual things. One is that which we must all have if we would enter the kingdom of heaven, a character of simplicity, purity, trustfulness, such as we see in children ; but the other is to be avoided, and yet is very common. When we are forgetful, easily annoyed, changeable, idle, thoughtless in church, when we hurry over our duties carelessly, what are we but troublesome children who do not behave as their Father bids them ?

14. *But strong meat belongeth to them that are of full age, even those who by reason of use have their senses exercised to discern both good and evil.*

God would have us wise hearers, and consistent doers. In reading a book or hearing a sermon, we should know how to choose the good and reject the bad. In life we should know how to choose our companions, how to get our lives in order. Why have we minds except to use them ? How is it that many live so foolishly, wasting their precious time, and never considering why God put them here, and what they ought to do ? It is a great gift to be able to discern good from evil, and well worth praying God for.

CHAPTER VI.

- 1. He exhorteth not to fall back from the faith, 11. but to be steadfast,
12. diligent, and patient to wait upon God, 13. because God is most
sure in his promise.**

THEREFORE leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection ; not laying again the foundation of repentance from dead works, and of faith toward God,

These two verses shew us what converts to Christianity, or children growing up in the faith, had to learn first of all. They began with

renouncing dead works, much as we say, “ Wilt thou renounce the world, the flesh, and the devil ? ” That came first, repentance or renunciation of evil. Then they promised to believe ; so we say, “ Dost thou believe all the articles of the Christian faith ? ” That was the second promise, faith, or submission to God’s revelation. Let nothing disturb this foundation in us ; it was laid long ago, and we ought to go on and add much else to it. Still without this foundation the building will never stand.

2. Of the doctrine of baptisms, and of laying on of hands, and of resurrection of the dead, and of eternal judgment.

This is like the end of the Creed. I acknowledge one Baptism for the remission of sins ; it differs thus from the various washings in use among the Jews. I believe one Catholic and Apostolic Church, in which laying on of hands is used as the sign of God’s blessing, as in Confirmation, Ordination, and other rites. I look for the resurrection of the dead and the life everlasting. Lord, may I ever in all my studies and works cling fast to this holy catholic faith as a guide. Wherever I go, let me not go from that.

3. And this will we do, if God permit.

Faith must grow, if it is living ; the soul needs food as well as the body. Do not rest content with being a Christian, but try every day to be a better instructed, more earnest, more deeply-grounded Christian. Scripture has depths fit for deep thinkers, as well as plain words fitted to a child’s ear. If you never learn fresh truths about God, take care lest you be not unlearning what you already hold.

4. For it is impossible for those who were once enlightened, and have tasted of the heavenly gift, and were made partakers of the Holy Ghost, 5. and have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come,

Here the Christian state is described in glowing words. We have been enlightened by God’s truth, fed by His love, encouraged by hopes of heaven. His Word is dear to us, our sins are washed away, our new life secure ; what can harm us now ? Alas, dear friends, some have felt thus before you, and yet have lost it all ! The wealth of blessing and heavenly comfort which they enjoyed has only made their fall more awful.

6. If they shall fall away, to renew them again unto repentance ; seeing they crucify to themselves the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame.

Christians were tempted then to join with Jews in their scoffs at Jesus Christ, to regard Him as an evil-doer, and His Death as the

punishment of a blasphemer. If their faith in His Divine glory grew cold, it was so easy for them to win applause and peace in this world by reviling their Saviour. Christians are tempted now to make a joke of deadly sin, to join in filthiness or cruelty, to laugh at the Bible and the Sacraments ; this also is like outrage done to the Lord Jesus. He feels the shame that is done to Him when His children behave so.

7. For the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from God :

My heart has drunk in the rain of God's grace, it has been tilled by holy teachings and warnings ; He has so long been waiting for a growth of good works from it. Lord, let it at last bring forth such a crop as may be worthy Thy acceptance. Without Thee I can do nothing, but by Thy mercy even I can pray and strive and live more fruitfully than I have done.

8. But that which beareth thorns and briers is rejected, and is nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned.

God is only provoked by those who use holy things without conversion of heart or fruits of a good life. That is like hopelessly barren soil which bears only weeds in spite of all that the gardener can do. When I read this verse, I cannot help fearing for myself ; I ask whether my doings have not been like the rubbish which was gathered from the unfruitful ground and burnt.

9. But, beloved, we are persuaded better things of you, and things that accompany salvation, though we thus speak.

I wish I could learn to think thus hopefully of my brethren. My warnings would do more good if I mixed more love and more hope with them. Perhaps many whom I regard as utterly careless have yet their hearts open to God's grace, they can be touched by His promises ; if I went to work with more hope I might discover infinite capacity for good in them.

10. For God is not unrighteous to forget your work and labour of love, which ye have shewed toward his name, in that ye have ministered to the saints, and do minister.

God does not forget ; no offering made for love's sake is unrewarded. How many sacrifices of love, of time, of care, of comfort, are daily made, which only the All-seeing Eye beholds ! Glory be to His Name for the self-sacrifice which He has breathed into many dear souls who give up themselves to work for others' sake. May He lead all such into the full knowledge of the Cross, which is the great Pattern of Sacrifice.

11. And we desire that every one of you do shew the same diligence to the full assurance of hope unto the end :

Let our good works be diligent, not the fruit of mere fancy, and our confidence lasting, not lightly taken up or laid aside. This character of continuance is the mark of a true Christian. Let our life be laid out on a certain plan, our prayers persevered in, our ways and walk be the same, that our friends may see our eyes are set steadily heavenward.

12. That ye be not slothful, but followers of them who through faith and patience inherit the promises.

Why have the saints gone before us? It was that we might follow their steps and win the crown they won. Their lofty faith and brave endurance are for our pattern; our careless lives are rebuked by hearing how

“The yearning faith of saints,
The unconquered hope that never faints,
The love of Christ that knows not shame,
The prince of this world overcame !”

13. For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he sware by himself, 14. saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. 15. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise.

Abraham won the promises by trusting in God. He was told that he should have a son in his old age, and that his seed should inherit the land, and he believed in this and lived for it because he trusted God's Word. We have higher promises made to us, but God is no less faithful now than of old. Those who believed in Him have found all that He said come true.

16. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. 17. Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:

Our salvation is grounded upon God's unchangeableness. As He is God, as He lives and endures from age to age, so His promises remain. He sware unto Abraham that he would give him such and such blessings, and His word is no less pledged to us. Heaven and earth may pass away, but faith and love and purity are eternal, because they rest on God's eternity. The world's threats and enticings are but the dust of a moment, we can look on beyond.

18. That by two immutable things, in which it was impos-

sible for God to lie, we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to lay hold upon the hope set before us :

We need a refuge to fly to in this stormy world, and God offers us His eternal promises. Tempests beat upon us, but we know where to find shelter. God's truth, His great love, His mercy pledged to us in Christ Jesus, are things that endure though all the world's bright days have passed. Let us only keep fast hold of His Word, and let no temptation tear us away.

19. Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast, and which entereth into that within the veil ;

This world is a troubled sea on which the soul tosses uneasily, but she cannot be shipwrecked while hope remains. If I lost my hope of heaven I should become a prey to the violent temptations or heavy troubles of life. I know not what would become of me but that the thought of my eternal home, which God's love has in a measure revealed to me, gives me steadfastness. Sailors persevere in working the ship through the hurricane, soldiers advance under a shower of balls, and shall not Christians keep right on whatever the world says or does ?

20. Whither the forerunner is for us entered, even Jesus, made an high priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

This is the foundation of my hope. Christ has entered heaven, and so makes ready a place there for me. The infinite gulf between my vileness and the sanctity of the holy place has been bridged by my Divine Friend, Who came down here to bring me back there with Him. He is our King, and will therefore own His subjects, our High Priest, and so plead for His worshippers. If we have travelled along with Him by faith through our mortal life we shall also end the journey in His good company.

CHAPTER VII.

i. Christ Jesus is a priest after the order of Melchisedec, ii. and so, far more excellent than the priests of Aaron's order.

FOR this Melchisedec, king of Salem, priest of the most high God, who met Abraham returning from the slaughter of the kings, and blessed him ;

We read this history in chap. xiv. of Genesis. Abraham, after winning a great victory, overthrewing the oppressors, and delivering his friends, when he was returning home in the height of his

greatness met some one greater than himself, whom he honoured as God's priest, to whom he gave offerings, from whom he received a blessing. He was thus reminded that all honour and victory come from God, and must be rendered back in thanks to Him. If we have overcome our spiritual enemies it was by His strength only, not our own.

2. To whom also Abraham gave a tenth part of all ; first being by interpretation King of righteousness, and after that also King of Salem, which is, King of peace ;

The name of this wonderful personage meant King of Righteousness ; the town over which he ruled was called Peace. He reminds us that these two blessings go together ; there can be no true peace in a household or a heart unless righteousness be there. God grant us this holy and lasting peace, even though wars rage without. If we are at peace with God no enemies can harm us.

3. Without father, without mother, without descent, having neither beginning of days, nor end of life ; but made like unto the Son of God ; abideth a priest continually.

Melchisedec's priesthood was not derived from a long line of ancestors like that of Jewish priests the descendants of Aaron, nor was he appointed priest (so far as we know) by any earthly authority, nor is it recorded how or when he gave up his office. He appears as a person set apart. God designed him to represent the office of Jesus our Lord, Whose Priesthood was from above, and remains for ever living and true. How can we offer anything to God acceptably unless through the hands of this holy and merciful Priest Who pleads for us ?

4. Now consider how great this man was, unto whom even the patriarch Abraham gave the tenth of the spoils.

Abraham gave God's priest a tenth of all that he had won, just as Jacob afterwards determined to set apart for God a tenth of all his gains. Do we always remember in our gettings to set apart God's portion ? As our means enlarge, our offerings, our charities, our time and labour to be devoted to God's service ought to increase in proportion. From whom comes our prosperity but from Him ?

5. And verily they that are of the sons of Levi, who receive the office of the priesthood, have a commandment to take tithes of the people according to the law, that is, of their brethren, though they come out of the loins of Abraham : 6. but he whose descent is not counted from them received tithes of Abraham.

and blessed him that had the promises. 7. And without all contradiction the less is blessed of the better.

Abraham, who had the promises, and who was the father both of Jewish priests and people, yet bowed down reverently before Melchisedec, and gave him tithe and received his blessing. Our Melchisedec is out of sight, yet we can approach Him humbly by faith, and put ourselves and all we have at His feet. Those who are set over their brethren ought to be especially careful to humble themselves in prayer before the Lord of Glory, the Fountain of all blessing !

8. And here men that die receive tithes ; but there he receiveth them, of whom it is witnessed that he liveth. 9. And as I may so say, Levi also, who receiveth tithes, payed tithes in Abraham. 10. For he was yet in the loins of his father, when Melchisedec met him.

Abraham paying tithes to Melchisedec represented the Levitical priesthood, his descendants, acknowledging a High Priest greater and more enduring than themselves. Mere men have been for a while set over their brethren, and commissioned to make offerings and give blessings, yet none can do this effectually except as representing Him Who is God, yet Man, Who has gone through our dying life, and now lives for ever. Christian priests are but His instruments, and point their brethren to Him, not to themselves.

11. If therefore perfection were by the Levitical priesthood, (for under it the people received the law,) what further need was there that another priest should rise after the order of Melchisedec, and not be called after the order of Aaron ?

No, perfection could not be by the Levitical priesthood ; its offerings were but slain beasts, its ordinances only figures, its cleansing but an outward washing ; something was wanted to go deeper into the heart. But since the true Priest came perfection is within our reach. Our prayers, our repentance, our love, our patience, ought now to be perfect ; we must not be contented till we have come as near as possible to Christ's pattern.

12. For the priesthood being changed, there is made of necessity a change also of the law.

This was hard for those who had been brought up as Jews ; they clung to God's ancient law as being perfect and unchangeable, yet God meant its outward letter to pass away, though the substance was fulfilled in Christ. It was changed by being completed and turned into an inward law of life. It is our law too, and yet only in its spirit.

13. For he of whom these things are spoken pertaineth to another tribe, of which no man gave attendance at the altar.
14. For it is evident that our Lord sprang out of Juda ; of which tribe Moses spake nothing concerning priesthood.

It is evident that our Lord was a Jew by birth, and was brought up in Palestine many centuries ago ; nay, but He belongs to us all. He is the true Priest and Teacher of all mankind. Aaron's sons ministered to one small nation in bygone days, but the Son of David helps true hearts in every place and age. We rejoice to acknowledge Him for our Lord, and to live as His faithful servants.

15. And it is yet far more evident : for that after the similitude of Melchisedec there ariseth another priest, 16. who is made, not after the law of a carnal commandment, but after the power of an endless life. 17. For he testifieth, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.

For ever ; "Christ being raised from the dead dieth no more." He has passed beyond the laws of time and change into the eternal world ; there He remains the same as He was when He rose from the grave. His risen body, His sacred wounds, His tender love and pity—nothing is altered. He still stretches out His pierced hands to bless us from behind the veil.

18. For there is verily a disannulling of the commandment going before for the weakness and unprofitableness thereof. 19. For the law made nothing perfect, but the bringing in of a better hope did ; by the which we draw nigh unto God.

Sacrifice was designed to establish, or knit afresh, union between God and man. It spoke of man offering himself and all he had to God, God welcoming man with peace and love. Yet the sacrifices of the Jewish law failed to accomplish this ; God and man were still kept apart ; all those rites profited little. Then the Lord Jesus came to do what the law could not do. He cleanses us perfectly from our sins, and enables us to draw near to God as His children. How grievous it would be if we let deadly sin tear us away from God again, and so undo Christ's work !

20. And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest : 21. (for those priests were made without an oath ; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec.) 22. by so much was Jesus made a surety of a better testament.

This testament or covenant under which we live is better than that of Moses, for it came of God's eternal purpose solemnly declared by Himself centuries before. We enjoy God's own Son for our Intercessor ; we have always a Friend Who pleads for us, and through Whom our poor prayers and scanty offerings are accepted by the Most High. We who live in gospel times have great privileges which the saints of old time would have delighted to know of.

23. And they truly were many priests, because they were not suffered to continue by reason of death : 24. but this man, because he continueth ever, hath an unchangeable priesthood. 25. Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them.

Death brought the high priest's work to an end under the law. He passed away and another took his place for a while, soon himself to lay it down. But death only began the priestly work of Christ. He entered on it when He died on the Cross, and continues it for ever in heaven. Remember that He can always hear and help ; no needs of ours but His loving mercy can minister to them. When we lose our friends by death, we are not forbidden to pray for them still. It may be that the great High Priest beyond the veil still applies to them the fruits of His Passion.

26. For such an high priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, separate from sinners, and made higher than the heavens ;

We needed such a High Priest as this ; our impurity needed a pure and spotless One to intercede. When we think of our own life, how polluted, how frail, how mistaken it is, how our best moments are mixed up with evil, we fly from ourselves and seek refuge with Him Who is perfect purity. Lord, I know that I am all folly and wretchedness, nor can any man on earth make me clean, nor can I find this grace at the hands of Thy angels, or saints, or even Thy holy Mother. I look to Thee alone for help.

27. Who needeth not daily, as those high priests, to offer up sacrifice, first for his own sins, and then for the people's : for this he did once, when he offered up himself.

Earthly ministers say with their brethren, "We acknowledge and bewail our manifold sins and wickedness ;" they pray that their sinful bodies may be made clean, and their souls washed ; they say, "We are not worthy." We cannot look to them to make offerings on our behalf ; all that we and they alike can do is to plead before God the one perfect Sacrifice which alone can cleanse and heal.

28. For the law maketh men high priests which have infirmity ; but the word of the oath, which was since the law, maketh the Son, who is consecrated for evermore.

Have we, then, no priests or sacrifices on earth ? Has Christ's priesthood made it unlawful for us to have priests, altars, and offerings in the Church of God ? No, we still plead Christ's sacrifice with the memorial which He Himself ordained. Christian ministers are set apart to represent their brethren, to bring their offerings to God's altar, and intercede for them. Yet this is only as a figure of what Christ does for us in heaven ; His priesthood lasts on for ever, and we on earth can but make use of it.

CHAPTER VIII.

1. By the eternal priesthood of Christ the Levitical priesthood of Aaron is abolished. 7. And the temporal covenant with the fathers, by the eternal covenant of the gospel.

NOW of the things which we have spoken this is the sum : We have such an high priest, who is set on the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in the heavens ; 2. a minister of the sanctuary, and of the true tabernacle, which the Lord pitched, and not man.

The reality is in heaven ; our worship on earth is but a shadow of that. Christ the Lord ministers there before His heavenly Father. The earthly sanctuary may seem empty and cold, and praises faint and prayers distracted, but behind the veil the true worship is going on, in infinite and unceasing glory. Our hearts must be lifted up thither.

3. For every high priest is ordained to offer gifts and sacrifices : wherefore it is of necessity that this man have somewhat also to offer.

No earthly temple is worthy of Christ's ministrations ; no gifts of money or slain beasts fit offerings for His hands. In heaven He presents to His Father Himself, and us with Him. He offers the remembrance of that true love, patience, and victory which He once shewed forth on earth, and the daily service of all His faithful members who fight against evil in His strength. Their struggles and prayers are His, He overcomes in them, and all this He perpetually presents to His Father.

4. For if he were on earth, he should not be a priest, seeing

that there are priests that offer gifts according to the law : 5. who serve unto the example and shadow of heavenly things, as Moses was admonished of God when he was about to make the tabernacle : for, See, saith he, that thou make all things according to the pattern shewed to thee in the mount.

No room for Christ Jesus at Jewish altars ; there all was taken up with the figures ; there all that could be seen was

“ Of things Divine the shadows bright,
The pageant of God’s perfect law.”

Yet the saints longed for something further. They said, “ I beseech Thee, shew me Thy glory.” Thanks be to God for shewing us more of heavenly things than Moses saw.

6. But now hath he obtained a more excellent ministry, by how much also he is the mediator of a better covenant, which was established upon better promises.

Why is the gospel covenant better than that which the Jews enjoyed ? Because God gives us there the pattern of His Son’s life to walk by, the sacrifice of His Son’s Death to cleanse us, the Holy Spirit to renew our hearts, heaven for our reward. All this is far more excellent than the Old Testament. Let us see to it that our worship, our duty, our faith, be worthy of God’s revelation.

7. For if that first covenant had been faultless, then should no place have been sought for the second.

The old covenant had many defects, yet it filled a place in God’s dispensation. It was meant to raise men’s minds by degrees to the true love of God and man. It was designed also to shew them their helplessness apart from grace. Our covenant with God is a far more perfect one, for He pledges Himself to give us the Holy Spirit, He reveals a heavenly standard, He unites us with Himself ; yet this too will not be perfected till heaven comes.

8. For finding fault with them, he saith, Behold, the days come, saith the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah : 9. not according to the covenant that I made with their fathers in the day when I took them by the hand to lead them out of the land of Egypt ; because they continued not in my covenant, and I regarded them not, saith the Lord.

The law of Moses failed with many Jews ; they forgot God’s mercies and judgments, and turned back to worship idols. So He in His own good time revealed something much better than the law ; yet this too fails to win all hearts. What else could God do for us.

now that His best treasures are despised? He has taken us by the hand and brought us out of misery and death, His tender mercies have been with us all along the way, yet we do not heed.

10. For this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, saith the Lord; I will put my laws into their mind, and write them in their hearts: and I will be to them a God, and they shall be to me a people:

Lord, fulfil in me this gospel promise. Let Thy love be the example of my life. Let the words of Scripture, early meditated and learnt, become to me an inward rule. This is true religion, not merely to perform so many outward acts, but to know God's goodness and greatness, and submit ourselves entirely to His holy Will. It is this which the Holy Spirit came to work in us.

11. And they shall not teach every man his neighbour, and every man his brother, saying, Know the Lord: for all shall know me, from the least to the greatest.

In this kind of learning the poor and simple may distance great scholars. It is learning of the heart rather than of the head. This knowledge is eternal life, and makes us happy on earth and glorious in heaven. Lord, let me give my best efforts to impart this knowledge to those who have it not. What greater praise could I desire than to have brought some soul to know God?

12. For I will be merciful to their unrighteousness, and their sins and their iniquities will I remember no more.

These are comfortable words. We enjoy under the gospel not only a spiritual law and a knowledge of God open to the simple, but an ever-flowing fountain of pardon. Let us take care not to stop God's forgiveness of us by a spirit of revenge toward our brethren. We should try to forget altogether unkind words or sharp dealings, or at least let our forgiveness be as free as though we had forgotten them. Thus we shall enjoy full pardon for our own much greater and more grievous shortcomings towards God.

13. In that he saith, A new covenant, he hath made the first old. Now that which decayeth and waxeth old is ready to vanish away.

Jewish rites belong now to the dead and buried past. No need for us to multiply offerings, or set our religion in keeping outward rites. God requires a new heart, offers a new law, breathes into us a new strength, sets before us a new example. Let us set our faces away from this decaying world towards His new and heavenly Jerusalem.

CHAPTER IX.

- 1. The description of the rites and bloody sacrifices of the law, ix. far inferior to the dignity and perfection of the blood and sacrifice of Christ.**

THEN verily the first covenant had also ordinances of divine service, and a worldly sanctuary.

The Israelites in the wilderness learnt that God's Presence went with them. His protection, His mercy, His holiness were close at hand wherever they might journey. All this was taught by the tabernacle with its sacred ornaments, which they took along with them. Not only in the land of promise would God be their God, but all through the desert. Christians do not need a moveable tabernacle to teach them this lesson ; God's Word and Sacraments are pledges that He is ever near ; nothing but sin can tear us from Him.

- 2. For there was a tabernacle made ; the first, wherein was the candlestick, and the table, and the shewbread ; which is called the sanctuary.**

What did these mean ? The golden candlestick which burnt in the sanctuary represented all gifts of the mind, all wisdom, holiness, or love, as coming from God. He alone kindles them and keeps them bright. The golden table with the shewbread spread upon it represented God's mercies in giving us food and all things necessary for this life. It made true worshippers desire the Living Bread which He gives to the soul. God is my light, God is my strength ; these were two lessons to be learnt in the tabernacle.

- 3. And after the second veil, the tabernacle which is called the Holiest of all ;**

The Holy of Holies represented God's Presence in heaven. In this life we are exiles from home, there is a veil between us and God, we are unworthy to come near Him. Under the old covenant the Holy of Holies remained dark and silent all the year ; no one could enter it except on the Day of Atonement. The thought of it made the people feel that they worshipped a God of awful holiness, One Whose nature they could not know ; they trembled at the thought of the Holy Place and Him Who inhabited it.

- 4. Which had the golden censer, and the ark of the covenant overlaid round about with gold, wherein was the golden pot that had manna, and Aaron's rod that budded, and the tables of the**

covenant ; 5. and over it the cherubims of glory shadowing the mercyseat ; of which we cannot now speak particularly.

The golden censer or incense altar close outside the veil spoke of prayer, the ark told of God's glory, the cherubim of the many orders of wonderful creatures who worship Him ; all was of gold to express His royalty. Human eyes might not see, human hands might not touch the signs of His awful Presence. All these mysterious figures are now perished. Jesus Christ our Saviour is our altar and our ark. He joins together true worship and Divine glory ; in Him we can enter God's Presence without fear.

6. Now when these things were thus ordained, the priests went always into the first tabernacle, accomplishing the service of God.

There true Israelites learnt that God was holy, that sin separated from His Presence and needed atonement ; there He was worshipped as the Giver of all good gifts. Indeed this was but in shadow and figure, yet no doubt it spoke to some hearts of great truths which were not fully declared as yet. The Church of Christ with its services speaks to us more clearly, and yet leads our thoughts onward to a still better worship which this earth cannot see.

7. But into the second went the high priest alone once every year, not without blood, which he offered for himself, and for the errors of the people :

On one day only in the year the most holy place was visited by any one. On that day the high priest came in there alone to wave the incense and sprinkle the blood ; no one else ever dared come in, and he on that day only, and bringing those things with him. Glory to God for having thrown open the holy place to us. His Son's Sacrifice and Intercession still last on. His prayers and perfect offerings supply our defects.

8. The Holy Ghost this signifying, that the way into the holiest of all was not yet made manifest, while as the first tabernacle was yet standing :

Under the law heaven was not clearly revealed, nor was the way known by which sinners could be purified before approaching God, nor was religion brought home to the understandings of the simple. We live in gospel times, have clear promises of our heavenly home, and know the way to reach it. We have the Holy Ghost to renew and cleanse our hearts. All this is the work of Christ Jesus for us.

9. Which was a figure for the time then present, in which

were offered both gifts and sacrifices, that could not make him that did the service perfect, as pertaining to the conscience ; 10. which stood only in meats and drinks, and divers washings, and carnal ordinances, imposed on them until the time of reformation.

Moses' law was full of rules about this or that food which might or might not be eaten, about the method of cleansing from certain ceremonial defilements, about the outward preparations necessary for God's priests. Our dear Lord goes straight to the heart, and tells us that nothing from without can defile a man. He bids us cleanse our conscience, and offer love. Where that is, the poorest offerings are sanctified by it. This is the time of reformation, when God would have His service made as perfect as possible. We are but Jews if we only attend in body, and forget the heart's worship.

11. But Christ being come an high priest of good things to come, by a greater and more perfect tabernacle, not made with hands, that is to say, not of this building ;

Christ offers us good things to come ; we have but a foretaste of them here, and the true tabernacle where He ministers gloriously is not to be found in this world. We must live by faith. This world's good things, even its best and sweetest, are soon exhausted ; the best hymns and psalms on earth are soon over ; perfect joy and perfect praise are to be found elsewhere.

12. Neither by the blood of goats and calves, but by his own blood he entered in once into the holy place, having obtained eternal redemption for us.

God's wisdom, power, and love joined together to accomplish this Redemption. No human cleansings could wash sin away, no human efforts open the door of heaven ; so the Incarnate Son of God took our case in hand, and provided a Sacrifice that could never lose its virtue. Lord, I adore Thy mercy, which has accomplished this ; let me not lose the benefits of Thy redeeming love.

13. For if the blood of bulls and of goats, and the ashes of an heifer sprinkling the unclean, sanctifieth to the purifying of the flesh : 14. how much more shall the blood of Christ, who through the eternal Spirit offered himself without spot to God, purge your conscience from dead works to serve the living God ?

Here is the difference between the old covenant and the new. The former had priests who were sinners, an earthly sanctuary, offerings

of slain beasts, cleansings of animals' blood, of ashes, or of water, outward defilements atoned for ; but we enjoy a Divine Priest, Who is our Redeemer as well as our Brother, Who ministers in heaven, Who pleads His own Blood, Who purifies the heart, Who gives new life. Shall not we, who have experienced such mercies, serve God with true devotion all our days ? He deserves our best service.

15. And for this cause he is the mediator of the new testament, that by means of death, for the redemption of the transgressions that were under the first testament, they which are called might receive the promise of eternal inheritance.

Israelites who served God obediently had the promise of a long and peaceful enjoyment of Canaan, but God has now thrown open to all men a better land of promise, where death will not enter. Our transgressions during the way can be blotted out by His mercy, the Jordan crossed safely by His help, and then the happy home will be ours for ever. Those are fools who seize on the world's pleasures and throw away God's promises.

16. For where a testament is, there must also of necessity be the death of the testator. 17. For a testament is of force after men are dead : otherwise it is of no strength at all while the testator liveth.

Jesus our Lord assigned to us the heavenly inheritance while He lived on earth, and His Death put us in possession of it. At the Last Supper I behold Him making His will, and leaving me legacies of blessing ; then He went forth to die, and all that He had wrought became mine. I thankfully acknowledge that His Death made me rich ; how poor should I be without it ! and yet He rose again, and lives for evermore to ensure my enjoyment of grace, not to hinder it.

18. Whereupon neither the first testament was dedicated without blood.

When Israel became God's people and entered into covenant with Him, blood was the solemn seal of the covenant (Exod. xxiv. 8). Now we are dedicated to God by Blood far more precious than that of oxen. The Blood that flowed from Christ's Side is applied to our souls in Baptism, is spiritually tasted by us in the Sacramental Cup. How grievous it would be for those who have been thus dedicated to God to break away from Him, and despise the Precious Blood !

19. For when Moses had spoken every precept to all the people according to the law, he took the blood of calves and of

goats, with water, and scarlet wool, and hyssop, and sprinkled both the book, and all the people, 20. saying, This is the blood of the testament which God hath enjoined unto you.

So Christ Jesus says to us in His Holy Supper, "This is My Blood of the New Testament which is shed for you and for many of the remission of sins." His law is holier than that of Moses, our engagement to keep it more binding than that which Israel made, His promises if we obey far greater, His power to cleanse us reaching deeper, yet His wrath more awful if we fall away. What are Moses, and Mount Sinai, and the old law, and the legal sacrifices, compared with Christ, His Church, His New Testament, His life-giving Sacraments?

21. Moreover he sprinkled with blood both the tabernacle, and all the vessels of the ministry.

The Holy Place and all that was in it needed to be purified. Holy persons, holy things, holy vestments, were all of this frail earth, and unable to bear the holiness of God's Presence. Pardon had to be sought even for the best and holiest that man could shew. Dear Lord, let clergy and choir learn this lesson, that if they are so much employed with the duties of Thy House, they need all the more frequently to be cleansed and purified from the many sins which beset them.

22. And almost all things are by the law purged with blood ; and without shedding of blood is no remission.

This law holds not almost, but altogether, in our case. Not a good thought in us but has been inspired by Christ's saving Death, not a good work but needs to be sprinkled with His Blood to make it acceptable. The Old Testament axiom that only blood could atone for sin has its meaning shewn in the virtue of Christ's Sacrifice.

23. It was therefore necessary that the patterns of things in the heavens should be purified with these; but the heavenly things themselves with better sacrifices than these.

When I read over the old laws about purifying, reckon up all that was necessary to make sinful men worthy to offer up the figures of legal worship, I have an uneasy feeling about myself. What, did people in those days have to be so reverent, so careful to remove any impurity, so attentive to many ordinances before they could draw near God, and yet I come to prayer so carelessly, my communions are so unprepared, my behaviour in God's House so profane ! Jewish worshippers had to seek purity so earnestly, where shall an irreverent Christian appear ?

24. For Christ is not entered into the holy places made with hands, which are the figures of the true; but into heaven itself, now to appear in the presence of God for us:

Jesus our Lord never officiated as High Priest on earth; He never stood within the veil, nor sprinkled the blood in the Holy Place. No; yet He did the high priest's work far more effectually, His prayers were a better incense, His Blood a mightier cleansing, His Death rent the veil asunder and let Him into heaven to plead with His Father there for us.

25. Nor yet that he should offer himself often, as the high priest entereth into the holy place every year with blood of others;

Christ made one perfect and effectual Sacrifice which still has power to blot out all our sins. This He represents for us in heaven, and we on earth shew forth the memorial of it at the Christian altar. It is His words, His acts, His love that avail for us. Beside Him there is no other in whom we can trust.

26. For then must he often have suffered since the foundation of the world: but now once in the end of the world hath he appeared to put away sin by the sacrifice of himself.

As we draw near to communicate the ages pass away, we stand at the Last Supper, or beneath the Cross, we hear the gracious words, behold the redeeming acts of the Saviour of men.

“ Victim Divine, Thy grace we claim,
As thus Thy precious Death we shew:
Once offered up, a spotless Lamb,
In Thy great temple here below,
Thou didst for all mankind atone,
And standest now before the Throne !”

27. And as it is appointed unto men once to die, but after this the judgment:

Ah, if I had to die more than once I might amend the second time the mistakes of the first, but that way can only be passed once. Repentance, prayer, preparation for my end must be thought of in time, lest I go out of the world altogether unfit to meet my God. Death and judgment are the only certain events in my future; whether I shall be rich, be happy, succeed, live long, leave a name behind me, I know not, but that I must die and be judged is absolutely certain.

28. So Christ was once offered to bear the sins of many; and unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation.

What a difference between Christ's two conditions! Once He was a Victim for sin, underwent suffering of mind and body, had to wrestle with Satan; but when we behold Him again He will be in glorious majesty, far out of the reach of evil. His faithful servants will rejoice to see Him appear.

CHAPTER X.

1. **The weakness of the law sacrifices.** 10. The sacrifice of Christ's body once offered, 14. for ever hath taken away sins. 19. An exhortation to hold fast the faith, with patience and thanksgiving.

FOR the law having a shadow of good things to come, and not the very image of the things, can never with those sacrifices which they offered year by year continually make the comers thereunto perfect.

Every year the sense of sin which weighed on the minds of believers found expression on the Day of Atonement. The high priest dressed in white garments entered the Holy of Holies with the atoning blood. The scapegoat on which the sins of the people were laid was set free in the wilderness. All represented a pure and holy One pleading before God for His people, reconciling them, delivering them from the burden of sin. And yet next year all this had to be done over again. In God's mercy we enjoy the reality of what was thus figured. No need for us to seek any other Day of Atonement since Christ has died.

2. **For then would they not have ceased to be offered?** because that the worshippers once purged should have had no more conscience of sins.

Those daily and yearly sacrifices were a confession of their own emptiness. The worshippers were always seeking for a new propitiation. They had not learnt of that one sacrifice in which mercy and holiness have met together. Our churches are simpler and plainer than the temple, but we set forth something there which they knew not of.

3. **But in those sacrifices there is a remembrance again made of sins every year.**

We have indeed sins to confess every year and every day, yet we do this knowing that Christ has died to blot them out. Let our repentance be not the formal running over a list of sins, but the grief of a contrite heart. If our Saviour has done and suffered so much

for our sake, we ought not to fall again into those sins from which He has once set us free.

4. For it is not possible that the blood of bulls and of goats should take away sins.

To take away the sin of man there needed a man, not a mere animal; a man who was himself pure, and so not in need of atonement, and one who should give himself freely, not be led unwillingly to the altar; and yet more than a mere man, one who could speak in the name of all mankind, and with a Divine power and love. Such an offering could do what the legal sacrifices failed in.

5. Wherefore when he cometh into the world, he saith, Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me: 6. in burnt offerings and sacrifices for sin thou hast had no pleasure. 7. Then said I, Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me,) to do thy will, O God.

Here we find revealed the plan of Christ our Lord. He came to offer the perfect obedience of life and death to His Father in the place of legal sacrifices. He knew that mankind needed a sacrifice, and He had determined from all eternity to offer and to be that sacrifice. He calls on us to join our obedience, though imperfect, to His own, that so He may present us with Himself to His heavenly Father. There is no nobler purpose than this, in earth or heaven, to do God's Will.

8. Above when he said, Sacrifice and offering and burnt offerings and offering for sin thou wouldest not, neither hadst pleasure therein; which are offered by the law; 9. then said he, Lo, I come to do thy will, O God. He taketh away the first, that he may establish the second.

O Lord, I know that all outward offerings are nothing in Thy sight; no sacrifices, no alms, no outward reverences, can supply the place of the heart. Give me grace to offer all my life long a ready obedience to Thy Divine Will, after the pattern of Thy Son. He can make up for the many defects in my obedience. If I have nothing else to bring, I will be patient; I will give up my own will to Thine.

10. By the which will we are sanctified through the offering of the body of Jesus Christ once for all.

Jesus Christ, Who is the Eternal Son of God, as well as the Son of man, Who is free from all stain of sin, Who knows our hearts and speaks in our name, was pleased freely to offer up an obedient

life and patient death to God on our behalf. He did what we could not do ; He felt what we ought to have felt. We see in His history God's compassion manifested, also the great mischief of sin, also the triumph of good, and to know all this is our peace.

11. *And every priest standeth daily ministering and offering oftentimes the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins :*
12. *but this man, after he had offered one sacrifice for sins for ever, sat down on the right hand of God ;*

Now the former atonements are all gone ; the shadow has passed and the substance come. The high priest stood for an instant within the veil ; he had no free access there ; he dared not remain in God's Presence. But our Saviour has wrought an eternal cleansing. He is Himself in heaven, and bids us approach ; He is there in eternal peace, and would have us get ready to join Him.

13. *From henceforth expecting till his enemies be made his footstool.*

Christ our Lord descends no more to struggle with evil, yet He overthrows it by the victories of His true servants. They are on His side ; all their combats are fought in the remembrance and by the strength of His own once fought ; they know He sees them, and will one day give them perfect victory. Let us be found among Christ's friends, not His enemies, in the dread Judgment Day.

14. *For by one offering he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified.*

Christ is our Head, His merits are ours, He shares our nature, and we in return enjoy the benefits of His work wrought for us. What though the rest of the family are evildoers, though they have committed sin beyond their power to repair, though there is no health in them, they have a Brother Who is perfectly good, Who has grieved for their evil, has repaired their faults, and pleaded for them with God.

15. *Whereof the Holy Ghost also is a witness to us : for after that he had said before, 16. this is the covenant that I will make with them after those days, saith the Lord, I will put my laws into their hearts, and in their minds will I write them ; 17. and their sins and iniquities will I remember no more.*

This is the new covenant of the gospel : a just and merciful God offers pardon and true peace and purity of heart to every soul that desires to receive it. Only let the soul unite itself to Jesus Christ, only let it receive His words, trust in His Death, follow His pattern, God will purge its stain, and love it for His Son's sake. If our hearts

answer to Christ's words we win forgiveness through the work He wrought for us. We have a Divine Redeemer, and this happy message restores us again to communion with God.

18. Now where remission of these is, there is no more offering for sin.

We expect no other Redeemer, no fresh Atonement. Christ has died for us, and we continually remember that one Sacrifice ; it is sufficient for all our needs. Praise to God's grace for having revealed to us Jesus as a Saviour. May we cling to Him all our days, and depart into the unseen world with faith in Him still bright within our hearts.

19. Having therefore, brethren, boldness to enter into the holiest by the blood of Jesus, 20. by a new and living way, which he hath consecrated for us, through the veil, that is to say, his flesh ; 21. and having an high priest over the house of God ;

These are the lessons which have been set before us in this epistle : Christ has died for us, Christ lives for us. He has by His Death made forgiveness and peace and new life possible ; our old sins are put away, and God's mercy revealed. And again, He still by His heavenly life and intercession there provides us with a true and faithful Friend Who helps us to follow Him. Have we made our own these two great truths ? Life cannot be altogether the same to us now that we have come to believe in the power of Christ's Blood to purify from past sin, and of His love to guard us from evil in time to come, now that God has brought us near to Him and given us courage.

22. Let us draw near with a true heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water.

Who but God Himself can give us this sincerity and trustfulness which He requires from His worshippers ? Our sins indeed come between Him and us, and seem to hide His face ; but then He has provided means of pardon for us in His Holy Church. Not only in Baptism, but all through our Christian life, we have access to that Fountain Which alone can purify from sin. However evil our conscience may be, whatever stains of sin have defiled us, yet there is a love which can wash all the past away.

23. Let us hold fast the profession of our faith without wavering ; (for he is faithful that promised ;)

Cling fast to the holy catholic faith which you have been taught. There you have confessed your faith in a heavenly Father, a

Divine Saviour, a life-giving Spirit, in a judgment to come, in a blessed eternity. Let no difficulties or scoffs persuade you to give up this. If you hold it fast you will one day prove that God is worthy of all your trust. Profess it while you live, and when you are about to die, and you will awake up to life everlasting still holding it fast.

24. And let us consider one another to provoke unto love and to good works :

It was Cain who said, "Am I my brother's keeper?" Let such selfishness be far from us. We all are strengthened when our brethren are strong ; we all are weakened when they fall. Rivalry as to which can love God and man best, helps, not hinders, both sides. Our friends, as they rise towards heaven, help us to climb also.

25. Not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as the manner of some is; but exhorting one another: and so much the more, as ye see the day approaching.

Do not give up coming to God's House. What if you have your own troubles and cares, what if worshippers are few, what if many would tempt you away from it? still always bear your part in the prayers and praises of the Church. We come there to appear before our God, and so prepare ourselves for that great assembly of earth and heaven when none can be absent. Those will feel most ready for Christ's visible appearing who have constantly sought His Presence in holy ordinances.

26. For if we sin wilfully after that we have received the knowledge of the truth, there remaineth no more sacrifice for sins,

This verse warns us against thinking lightly of any deadly sin. For one who has known Christ's truth, and been admitted into His Holy Church, to fall away wilfully and choose His enemies' side, is to throw away salvation. What else but the Cross can give us forgiveness? If we refuse that, there is no other atonement ; yet that Sacrifice has infinite power to cleanse us still, if we will give up our sins and trust again in Divine mercy.

. 27. But a certain fearful looking for of judgment and fiery indignation, which shall devour the adversaries.

O Lord, my own sins make me tremble when I read this grave warning. How often have I been an adversary to Thy grace ! How close I have been to utter ruin ! Yet, as I believe in Thy wrath, so I believe in Thy love ; both are infinite. Let me never know the hopeless misery of one who stands face to face with sin and

death, and yet has lost all hope of a Saviour. I do not complain if I have some seasons of fear, but do Thou restore to me the light of Thy countenance again.

28. He that despised Moses' law died without mercy under two or three witnesses :

We read this in Deuteronomy xvii. 2-7. Now if the old law punished so severely those who wilfully forsook God's service and worshipped idols, can we hope to escape unpunished if we forsake Him now? Those who yield to deadly sin embrace death instead of life; they bring on themselves a sentence of death inwardly in the heart, and often visible ruin as well.

29. Of how much sorer punishment, suppose ye, shall he be thought worthy, who hath trodden under foot the Son of God, and hath counted the blood of the covenant, wherewith he was sanctified, an unholy thing, and hath done despite unto the Spirit of grace?

Dear friend, you have been baptized, confirmed, become a communicant, you have prayed to your Saviour, sung His praises, partaken of His saving Body and Blood; others may not know, but you know well, what His goodness is. If then you are found scoffing at religion, indulging in deadly sins of uncleanness, leading others into evil too, you may read in this verse what God's Word says of you.—You have thrown away God's precious gifts and despised all His long-suffering. This is an awful verse, fit to thunder in our ears, and make us see on what a precipice we stand.

30. For we know him that hath said, Vengeance belongeth unto me, I will recompense, saith the Lord. And again, The Lord shall judge his people. 31. It is a fearful thing to fall into the hands of the living God.

As we sow, so we shall reap. This holds true, both in nature and morals. No one can wilfully break God's laws without bringing down retribution on himself. As God waits to be gracious, as He is full of patience and mercy, so also He has sure and certain judgments, though they seem to tarry long. Remember, holiness is as much a part of God's character as mercy. If He is what He is, then cruelty and filthiness and profaneness must bring misery. He cannot treat them as He does the contrite and humble heart.

32. But call to remembrance the former days, in which, after ye were illuminated, ye endured a great fight of afflictions; 33. partly, whilst ye were made a gazingstock both by reproaches

and afflictions; and partly, whilst ye became companions of them that were so used.

Call to mind the former days when you first took God's side. You did not then mind giving up your leisure, braving trouble and the scoffs of your friends; you denied yourself pleasure; you took suffering patiently. Then you plainly chose Christ for your Master, and were not ashamed to follow Him. Why have you so much altered now? Time spent in prayer was sweet, you loved church-going, you sought good works to do, you reckoned little of abuse or contempt in those first happy days of your turning to God. .

34. For ye had compassion of me in my bonds, and took joyfully the spoiling of your goods, knowing in yourselves that ye have in heaven a better and an enduring substance.

These poor Christians were robbed and ill-treated, but they comforted themselves with the thought that a good conscience, and God's grace here and His promises hereafter, are possessions no one could steal from them. This world's distresses soon pass, and those who have sought the true riches will enjoy them for ever. Our small self-denial and scanty patience are rebuked by the endurance of such persons as these, who had to bear heavy persecutions.

35. Cast not away therefore your confidence, which hath great recompence of reward.

Do not throw away your trust in God's mercy. No one can rob you of it unless you wilfully cast it from you. It is worth more than money or the praises of men to have God for a friend and His Word for a support. If you trust in the love of some dear soul who believes in you and cares for you, remember that human love represents to us One full of all goodness, Who can read our heart and yet loves us still.

36. For ye have need of patience, that, after ye have done the will of God, ye might receive the promise.

Give me, O Lord, a stedfast heart, that I may do Thy Will here and receive Thy promise hereafter. I do not choose to have my reward on earth. Indeed, I have many tokens of Thy mercy round me now, but I am content to wait for the full payment till another day. Let me take all crosses that come as sent to exercise my patience and fit me for the promised reward.

37. For yet a little while, and he that shall come will come, and will not tarry.

Will not redeemed souls look back one day on their earthly course,

and wonder how soon it was over? It will seem to them but a little while; a little while for joy and for tears and for patience, then the end, as God's Word foretold it. They will then

“ Wonder at His deep love Who purged so base
And earthly mould so soon for the undefiled place.”

38. Now the just shall live by faith: but if any man draw back, my soul shall have no pleasure in him.

This is the watchword of saints; we know well that “our hope, our treasure is not here.” We live by faith, not by sight, nor altogether by reason.

“ Faith is our skill, faith strength affords
To keep pace with God's gracious words,”

though all the face of the world seems adverse. The more that trials and afflictions abound, the more closely we will keep to our Saviour. His almighty grace that has redeemed us and brought us so far on our way can make us persevere.

39. But we are not of them who draw back unto perdition; but of them that believe to the saving of the soul.

We will not be cowards. The rest of the Lord's army have fought the fight, received and dealt blows, crossed the river, won the crown; shall we be behind them? What folly it would be to have to endure all the mortifications, pains, annoyances of the world, and be beaten after all! Only pluck up heart a little longer, and the evening will come, and you will be safe with Christ for ever.

CHAPTER XI.

1. What faith is. 6. Without faith we cannot please God. 7. The worthy fruits thereof in the fathers of old time.

NOw *faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

This is the glorious chapter which recounts all the achievements of faith. First we learn what it is, that grace which makes our hopes real, and proves to us what is beyond our senses. Human reason finds this world sad and hopeless at last. Human sight and touch can only lay hold of material things; but faith reveals to us a glorious world above, full of greater things than we can yet comprehend.

2. *For by it the elders obtained a good report.*

Any one who did any good did it by faith ; he threw himself boldly upon the unseen, despised the pleasures and terrors of this world, lived for what was above. Let me too be joined to that noble army who have made faith their rule. Their memory is fragrant still, while those who have lived for their own pleasure are abhorred or forgotten.

3. Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear.

The beginning of Scripture and of the Creed gives us this first article of our faith, God is the Maker of heaven and earth. All this great world that we see came into being ages since, at His Will, and can when He pleases pass away again. Its grandeur, vastness, beauty, must not overpower our minds, for we know how much greater is He Who made it.

4. By faith Abel offered unto God a more excellent sacrifice than Cain, by which he obtained witness that he was righteous, God testifying of his gifts : and by it he being dead yet speaketh.

Faith tells us to worship God. Abel did this acceptably. He brought his best as an offering. His heart was full of reverence and love, and so his sacrifice became an example of true worship, and his death of patient suffering. Our sacrifices must not be like Cain's, accompanied by a jealous, sullen temper. Such cannot please God. Dead people speak still to us by their lives and examples ; they bid us listen while our day of life lasts.

5. By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death ; and was not found, because God had translated him : for before his translation he had this testimony, that he pleased God.

Faith bids us remember God's Presence. In Enoch's day there were no appearances of God to men. He lived by faith, and by the histories of God's dealing which he learnt from Adam ; but he walked with God, feeling how near He was, and that all his own thoughts and words should be fitting for such a Friend to witness. This admirable lesson would transform all our life too, if we learnt it.

6. But without faith it is impossible to please him : for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him.

The soul leans on these two truths : (1) There is a God ; all things within and without bear witness to Him. (2) He is our helper and friend and judge, so there are means whereby we can have

access to Him ; He cannot have left us in darkness. These two truths, that there is a God, and that He is our God, are the foundation on which the whole of Scripture and the catholic faith have been built up.

7. By faith Noah, being warned of God of things not seen as yet, moved with fear, prepared an ark to the saving of his house ; by the which he condemned the world, and became heir of the righteousness which is by faith.

Faith tells us to fear God's judgments. God warned Noah of the coming flood. He warns us of judgment to come, and of the possibility of eternal loss. Let us leave the company of those who scoff at God's warnings, and cling fast to the Cross of Christ, which is the saving ark that can lift us up above the ruin of the world. The world laughs at God's warnings now, as it did in Noah's day, but we believe in them, and so find salvation.

8. By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed ; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.

Faith bids us give up our earthly prospects when God calls. Abraham left his country and friends and became a wanderer over the earth. If it is God's Will to remove us from pleasant home and dear friends and high expectations, remember that He can be to us far more than what we lose. Abraham had, wherever he went, the precious treasure of faith in one true and living God ; he was far richer in this than the heathen world among which he moved.

9. By faith he sojourned in the land of promise, as in a strange country, dwelling in tabernacles with Isaac and Jacob, the heirs with him of the same promise :

Such is the life of faith. Believers feel they have no lasting home here. They are ready to quit their camping-ground at any moment, and move on elsewhere. They enjoy thankfully the green shade and fresh stream, but know they must leave it to-morrow. If God so helps and comforts us while we are on the journey, how good He will be to us when we reach home !

10. For he looked for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God.

" Blessed city, heavenly Salem,
Vision dear of peace and love."

There we look to find rest after the world's changes are over. The greatest palaces on earth have no sure foundations ; they and their possessors soon pass away, but God is the eternal dwelling-place

of His chosen. He has for them something more than this life can give.

11. *Through faith also Sara herself received strength to conceive seed, and was delivered of a child when she was past age, because she judged him faithful who had promised.*

Faith tells us that God's promises will come true. Even though earthly wisdom and experience are otherwise, yet we have an Almighty Friend Who is able to bring to pass what He has told us of. This promise to Abraham and Sarah came true, and brought them great joy. There will be a time when all God's saints will have reason to rejoice that things have come out as He said they would.

12. *Therefore sprang there even of one, and him as good as dead, so many as the stars of the sky in multitude, and as the sand which is by the sea shore innumerable.*

See what consequences one man's faith had ; it brought a blessing upon multitudes after him ; they inherited the knowledge of God, and were brought up in His covenant. Remember that one act of faith, one resolute stand against temptation, one earnest act of devotion, may have great consequences. It may spread on in ever wider circles while the world lasts. Abraham's literal descendants were the Jews, but all those belong to Him spiritually who believe in God's commands and promises.

13. *These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth.*

They were tossed on a rough sea, but saw in the distance the outlines of the land of peace which they should one day arrive at. They wandered and stumbled through the long night, but noticed faint streaks of the breaking dawn. This earth, at its brightest, could not give them entire satisfaction ; the best days on it are few and evil ; the best things it offers are signs of somewhat better.

14. *For they that say such things declare plainly that they seek a country. 15. And truly, if they had been mindful of that country from whence they came out, they might have had opportunity to have returned.*

The faith of the patriarchs was a great step in raising man towards higher things. They learned to depend on an invisible guide, to look for a future home, to be content though death came on them before their hopes could come true. These are lessons which I

too need to learn. Sometimes there is a danger lest my earthly home and pleasures should enslave me and make me forget what lies beyond.

16. But now they desire a better country, that is, an heavenly: wherefore God is not ashamed to be called their God: for he hath prepared for them a city.

The heavenly country, the vision of God, the abiding city, are prospects greater than this world can find room for. What changes here below can hurt me if I have such a home, such a Friend, waiting for me elsewhere? Only let me not be ashamed of God. Others may forsake Him, but I know He is the best of Friends, and I should part with all things sooner than with Him.

17. By faith Abraham, when he was tried, offered up Isaac: and he that had received the promises offered up his only begotten son, 18. of whom it was said, That in Isaac shall thy seed be called:

Faith at times bids us part with what we hold most dear, whether persons whom we love, or works that we think most useful and necessary. God, to try us, requires such a sacrifice; it is indeed His love that gave the dear soul, or the favoured work to us, and yet it is He Who requires it of us again. Here is a great mystery, yet we must do as Abraham did, with anguish in his heart, yet with entire obedience to Him Whose Voice had been his lifelong guide.

19. Accounting that God was able to raise him up, even from the dead; from whence also he received him in a figure.

God bids parents now part with their dear children, either for some long separation, or for the last lonely journey. What comfort have they except in the thought of their heavenly Father, to Whose keeping they intrust what they hold so dear? He is able to unite us again, even though life and death have come between. Even in this world there are happy meetings of long-parted friends, but yet these are only figures of the Resurrection morning.

20. By faith Isaac blessed Jacob and Esau concerning things to come.

Faith overcomes time and space. Isaac disposed of God's promises and the inheritance to come, as though he had it in his hands at the moment. A settled trust in God made him sure that though he died the promises would be fulfilled. The patriarchs passed on from one to the other this treasure of hope and faith. Their children were brought up to think on God's promises and look for their fulfilment.

21. *By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.*

Faith illuminates the bed of death. There, failing strength and darkening sight, and the near prospect of the grave, seem to bring man to nought; but those who have loved God and believed His Word do not lose hold of His Hand in that supreme moment. Jacob felt how God had fed, had guided, had comforted him, so he entered on the unseen world with words of trust on his lips. He had had a troubled stormy life, but yet found peace at the last.

22. *By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.*

Joseph died after holding great honours and achieving great glory, but he did not cling to all this. His heart was in the future, so he laid down his burdens and glories cheerfully, looking forward to lying with his fathers in the promised land, amidst the prayers and praises of God's worshippers there. Let our faith in the judgment of God upon the world, in the communion of saints, in the life everlasting, burn up brighter just when the world's light goes out for us.

23. *By faith Moses, when he was born, was hid three months of his parents, because they saw he was a proper child; and they were not afraid of the king's commandment.*

Faith strengthens love. Moses' parents looked up to God Who had given them so fair a child, and so they gained courage to save its life against the tyrant's order. God's help did not fail them, and their child grew up to be the great Prophet and Deliverer. Let us, too, cling boldly to the instincts of love and duty and truth which God has set within us, without being afraid of men's scoffs.

24. *By faith Moses, when he was come to years, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter; 25. choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season;*

Ah, this choice is set before us all at some time of our life! Whose side are we on? Do we hold with God's people and their life of patience, often of pain and danger? Can we take up the cross daily and feel for the suffering? or shall we embrace the way of self which seeks for pleasure and wealth, and laughs at self-denial? Let me, as I pass along the world's road, look out for God's people and throw in my lot with them; let me be bold and despise sin's pleasures; they soon pass.

26. Esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt: for he had respect unto the recompence of the reward.

God's people are all one in different ages, and Christ is their Master, so He takes their reproach on Himself, and turns it into infinite blessing and honour. One day it will be unspeakable joy to have been reviled for taking the Lord's side. Those who bear His Cross will share His crown. The world's best things are transitory, but God has for those who love Him something more than man's heart can comprehend as yet.

27. By faith he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing him who is invisible.

Faith makes company for us in lonely hours. Moses was happy in the desert, for he found there an unseen but ever-present Friend. Pharaoh, with his glory and his wrath and his treasures, was nothing in the sight of one who was accustomed every day to seek God's Presence in prayer. If our life becomes lonely as the years roll on, yet we can in prayer visit the invisible world, and find friends and a home there.

28. Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them.

Faith tells us that there is a Christian Passover, wherein the sacrifice of our redemption is represented. There we spiritually receive that true Paschal Lamb Who was once slain for our salvation; there the precious purifying Blood is applied to our souls. As all faithful Israelites rejoiced to observe the figure, so faithful Christians should rejoice to observe the reality. What can hurt us if we are one with Christ, and Christ with us?

29. By faith they passed through the Red Sea as by dry land: which the Egyptians assaying to do were drowned.

Faith bids us remember our Baptismal Covenant. There we renounced the world, the flesh, and the devil, there we were signed with the Cross, and taken into God's family. That water was the Red Sea which separates us from the unbelieving world. We must live now, not as slaves of sin, but as God's redeemed children.

30. By faith the walls of Jericho fell down, after they were compassed about seven days.

Faith makes us cast in our lot with God's Church, and believe that it will triumph against all the works of evil. The walls of the great and wicked city fell down before the trumpets of Israel as

they bore the Ark of the Covenant. Our best weapons, too, are to worship God heartily and trust in His Presence with us. The Church will prove strongest in the end.

31. By faith the harlot Rahab perished not with them that believed not, when she had received the spies with peace.

Faith makes us discern God's servants, and take them for our friends. Rahab had heard of the true God and believed in His power, and knew that His friends would gain the victory. This made her quit the side of her own townspeople and rank herself amongst believers. God's grace sought her out, gave her faith, and restored her a pure heart.

32. And what shall I more say? for the time would fail me to tell of Gedeon, and of Barak, and of Samson, and of Jephthae; of David also, and Samuel, and of the prophets:

Holy Scripture is no mere history of old times, but the account of those who possessed a knowledge of the true God, and how they fared with it. No doubt they had their trials and their sins, yet faith in one true and living God raised them up above the world's corruption, gave them courage, strength, and patience; they fought as His soldiers, judged as His ministers. We know more about God's ways than they did, and yet we have much to learn from their example.

33. Who through faith subdued kingdoms, wrought righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions,

These were great heroes and saints, and they wrought on the world's stage, with all men's eyes upon them. Nay, you also have to fight before God and the angels. Satan's hosts, the world's persuasions, wild beasts of evil passion, are against you as they were against them. Who can subdue, can accomplish, can restrain, but our Divine Lord? We can overcome by His strength only.

34. Quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, waxed valiant in fight, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.

Faith has sometimes wrought great victories on earth, made a few overcome many, discovered new worlds, delivered the oppressed when all hope seemed lost. It has pleased God, now and then, to overthrow, for His servants' sake, all the terrors and splendours of the world, and shew visibly that He was on the side of the weak. Those who trusted in Him have had occasion to praise His Name for a great deliverance.

35. Women received their dead raised to life again: and

others were tortured, not accepting deliverance ; that they might obtain a better resurrection :

Faith has more often been overcome in this world, and yet has conquered even in death. What, believers are cut off by an early death, are mocked by an unkind world, are imprisoned or even killed ; where is their hope gone ? No, their hope was not tied to this world ; they accepted patiently the worst evils that came, knowing that God could recompense them. Their agony was short, their joy everlasting.

36. And others had trial of cruel mockings and scourgings, yea, moreover of bonds and imprisonment : 37. they were stoned, they were sawn asunder, were tempted, were slain with the sword : they wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins ; being destitute, afflicted, tormented ;

What comfort and strength from above God's servants must have received to make up for this world's cruelty ! When all things seemed darkest then they found the most inward joy and peace. They often have said while in the greatest misery that what they enjoyed far more than made up for their sufferings. How can we who live selfish lives understand the great joy and glory of self-sacrifice such as theirs was ? Their patience preserved for us all that we enjoy ; in their worst agony God never forsook them.

38. (Of whom the world was not worthy :) they wandered in deserts, and in mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

If you are alone, or have to suffer contempt or abuse, remember the saints of God who have gone before you. The best and holiest men were often in their own day misunderstood and hated. Christ our Lord, and His saints, were cast out as unfit to live, when the vilest were in power and good repute. Let such thoughts strengthen us to endure what contempt the silly world may pour upon us for serving God. Earth may be sad and dull, but heaven will soon take its place.

39. And these all, having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise :

Faith's heroes were not paid in this world ; they passed away with longings unfulfilled, yet knowing that the God Whom they trusted would be their everlasting Friend. In the Old Testament times some rays of God's awful majesty were made known ; souls were stirred up to believe and obey and fight against sin, but the full revelation of Divine love was not given then. We enjoy now the truths that Jewish saints sought for ; let our faith be at least no colder than theirs was.

40. God having provided some better thing for us, that they without us should not be made perfect.

If God has given us better things than they found, our gratitude should be in proportion. We have promises come true, God manifested in Jesus Christ, salvation wrought, the catholic church set up, the Scriptures completed. Glory be to God for the light of His holy gospel, yet, alas! all this gives only poison to some. If our opportunities are so great, beware lest our fall be also beyond remedy.

CHAPTER XII.

1. An exhortation to constant faith, patience, and godliness. 22. A commendation of the new testament above the old.

WHEREFORE seeing we also are compassed about with so great a cloud of witnesses, let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us, and let us run with patience the race that is set before us,

We have a race to run ; saints and angels look on ; our eternal happiness depends on our winning. Will not a love for money, or for idle pleasures, or some evil desire indulged, trip us up and prevent our reaching the goal ? It is a good thing to remember that we in our day are living in the sight of good and evil powers. None are alone, saints pray for us, devils tempt us ; meanwhile we pass on rapidly, and the race is soon won or lost. God give us strength to persevere in spite of all hindrances.

2. Looking unto Jesus the author and finisher of our faith ; who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is set down at the right hand of the throne of God.

Right in front at the end of the course sits our Lord once crucified, now glorified. He went the same way that we are going. He, too, was tempted, was hungry and thirsty, was alone, was sad and troubled. He knew the bitter scourging and the Cross ; our worst hours are known to Him. He has now gained everlasting peace at God's right hand. How can we, dear friends, endure the cross or despise the shame except we keep our eyes fixed on our Saviour. Many Christians have overcome suffering by the thought of what Christ suffered.

3. For consider him that endured such contradiction of sin-

ners against himself, lest ye be wearied and faint in your minds.

Think Who it is that died for you, and you will be able to endure pain better. What, shall God's own Son bear the Cross, and we expect to live at ease? Is it so strange that others should ill-use or despise us, that our hearth should be desolate, or our spirits low? The Most Holy One went along this road and marked it with His Blood. We have but to set our footsteps where He trod.

4. Ye have not yet resisted unto blood, striving against sin.

Sin is the deadly enemy; we should resist him though the struggle costs us much. Christ and the saints shed their own blood in the fight. Soldiers do not win a victory without hard blows, and pain and danger. It is no easy matter to stand firm in the ranks and take death patiently. We who are Christian soldiers and bound to fight against the world, the flesh, and the devil, cannot hope to get off without some bruises.

5. And ye have forgotten the exhortation which speaketh unto you as unto children, My son, despise not thou the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when thou art rebuked of him:

Holy Scripture speaks to us in words of warning and comfort. All our life through we may learn from it what is God's Will for us. We are bidden, when the Cross comes upon us, not to despise it nor yet faint under it. It is from God, and we must embrace it patiently, knowing that it is His love which invisibly brings it to us, though men or chance are His instruments.

6. For whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth.

It is very hard to see this when we suffer from wicked men or from our own folly, yet be assured that all that befalls us comes of God; it is either to try us, or to teach us, or to purify our hearts. The best and holiest persons that the world has seen have known what suffering was; they drunk the bitter cup to the dregs, and found its healing virtue.

7. If ye endure chastening, God dealeth with you as with sons; for what son is he whom the father chasteneth not? 8. But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons.

Some poor children have no father to acknowledge them, no one to care whether they learn or obey. They are left to a sad freedom of taking their own way and associating with whom they please. God in His mercy has dealt otherwise with us. He has punished

our misdoings, set us hard lessons to learn, laid down rules for our life, given us labour to do for Him. All these are signs that we are indeed His children, and that He is preparing a heavenly inheritance for us.

9. *Furthermore we have had fathers of our flesh which corrected us, and we gave them reverence: shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits, and live?*

We did not doubt fathers' or mothers' love even when they punished us, or denied our wishes; our Father in heaven ought to be no less trusted. He regards us with greater tenderness and more far-seeing wisdom than our earthly parents do. We are meant to learn to love and honour our heavenly Father by keeping the Fifth Commandment here below. And then again by doing our duty to God we are enabled to behave still better towards our parents. Each duty helps the other.

10. *For they verily for a few days chastened us after their own pleasure; but he for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.*

Boys soon grow into men, and themselves in turn become fathers, with a household to govern. Their training for life is done, whether they have used it well or ill. But even in extreme old age we are all God's children, learning how to obey Him and prepare for heaven. This world's education has often mistakes in it, and we find some of our boyish learning useless afterwards; but God's training is sure and wise, and goes deeper into the heart. What seems hardest, what seems sharpest, yet comes of our good and wise Master for our everlasting profit.

11. *Now no chastening for the present seemeth to be joyous, but grievous: nevertheless afterward it yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness unto them which are exercised thereby.*

Let me accept affliction with a quiet mind; however grievous it be, it is from God, and for my good. I see it has been so in the past, and I do not doubt it now.

"I would not miss a sob or tear,
Heart-pang or throbbing brow,
Sweet was the chastisement severe,
And sweet its memory now."

12. *Wherefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees;*

Do not let pain or loss when they come stop your good works or make you give up your prayers. Hands should do work for God, knees be bent in devotion to Him, whether the world smiles or not. Lord, strengthen my hands to help the helpless, and give my

prayers day to day fervour to carry them up to Thy throne. I will never let myself be discouraged by trouble from serving God ; nay, I shall bear up better if I use alms and prayer to help me.

13. And make straight paths for your feet, lest that which is lame be turned out of the way ; but let it rather be healed.

How many halt in the road, scarce knowing which way to go ! Our influence may be great either way ; either to strengthen them to walk towards heaven, or (which God forbid) to send them the wrong road. Those who are set over their brethren should bear in mind how easily their language, or their temper, or their evil ways, may encourage the young to be careless. It would be a grave thing for me if my stumbling in the road brought some dear souls to fall away utterly from God. If His loving mercy has healed me of the bitter past, I will bring others to know the same healing.

14. Follow peace with all men, and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord :

Persecution has its dangers too ; it may make us bitter or reckless. It is not easy to bear sharp words or cruel pain, and yet be inwardly at peace, and watchful over ourselves. This warning must be kept in mind, for suffering of itself cannot make us holy. Do we not know some persons, all whose pain only turned to their ruin ? Lord, keep me from a revengeful, grudging spirit, and help me to follow Thy Divine pattern of love and truth, whichever way the wind blows.

15. Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God ; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled ;

What are roots of bitterness ? Bad examples, scoffers, jealous, quarrelsome tempers. All these are bitter roots, and have bitter fruits. Let us watch carefully over the young, so as to check evil in its first beginnings, and plant instead the sweet, wholesome plants of love and duty. In any family bitter roots may spring up and spread, and work divisions and hatred. God give us grace to cut them down in time, and plant peace again.

16. Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.

What did Esau care, so long as his appetite was satisfied ! The birthright meant the treasure of God's promises, a mysterious future of grace and glory, but all that he cared for was his sport and his dinner. There are many Esaus amongst us now who despise religion, with its deep fears and sweet promises. So long as they have enough amusement and can live as they please, they

put aside all thoughts of a higher world ; they greedily seize on pleasure, and forget all else.

17. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected : for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears.

Too late, too late ; he had thrown away his hopes, and found out what he had done when the blessing was gone. Keep us, Lord, we beseech Thee, from the fruitless misery of finding too late that peace and hope and love are gone, and we have nothing but bitter memories in their place. Give us blessed tears now, that we may rejoice at last.

18. For ye are not come unto the mount that might be touched, and that burned with fire, nor unto blackness, and darkness, and tempest, 19. and the sound of a trumpet, and the voice of words ; which voice they that heard intreated that the word should not be spoken to them any more :

That was indeed

"A day of wrath and not of grace,
A dim and dreadful day."

Man could not be brought so near to God, yet without a Redeemer, and not feel afraid. God's holiness, His incomprehensible majesty and power, were made known then as they never had been before, and man felt in such a Presence his own utter vileness. The terrors of Mount Sinai shew us what the thought of God's judgment would be but for the cleansing Blood and saving Cross.

20. (For they could not endure that which was commanded, And if so much as a beast touch the mountain, it shall be stoned, or thrust through with a dart :

There was then no access to God ; creatures could not live when His Face was revealed ; an infinite gulf separated Him from His works. Glory be to Jesus, Who has bridged over this, and brought down Godhead to earth, and raised up creatures again toward God.

21. And so terrible was the sight, that Moses said, I exceedingly fear and quake :)

Even Moses, the servant of the Lord, was full of fear. He was himself a man and a sinner ; nor could he turn away all God's wrath or know all His love. We who worship Christ our Saviour know what God's love is, and so are encouraged to draw near ; only we must not forget all our fear. When we approach God's altar it is well to remember how great is that Majesty which is hidden there under simple signs. How frightful irreverence is at such a moment !

22. But ye are come unto mount Sion, and unto the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to an innumerable company of angels,

I am so near to the invisible world, only a thin veil separates me from it. God and His angels and my everlasting home are close at hand. Shall I give way to deadly sin, or follow the world's evil ways, when a few more days will make me safe and happy for ever? Lord, Who hast brought me so far on my road, grant me not to miss the little bit of way that remains to find.

23. To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect,

My friends are the blessed ones who have served God and are now at rest. They have trusted in God, and He will declare them His own before earth and heaven. They are happy now, and will be happier yet when the end comes. Let my life and thoughts and ways be such as to fit me for that glorious company. I do not want them to have cause to be ashamed of me.

24. And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel.

My trust is in that saving Blood which has more power to cleanse than all my sins have to defile. It has been often applied to my sinful heart, but I venture yet again to seek for pardon through it. My Lord comes close to me spiritually at His Table, and offers me that precious Blood that speaks of new life and a clean heart and God's infinite love.

25. See that ye refuse not him that speaketh. For if they escaped not who refused him that spake on earth, much more shall not we escape, if we turn away from him that speaketh from heaven :

When Moses came down from listening to God upon the Mount his face shone, and he carried in his hands the Divine law, engraven on two tables of stone. But we have God's own Son for our Teacher, and His Spirit to write the law of grace on our hearts. In the gospel heaven has been opened, and much more shewn of God than the Jews knew. God has spoken to us in Jesus Christ mercifully, fully, gloriously ; it would be our ruin to turn a deaf ear to that gracious Voice.

26. Whose voice then shook the earth : but now he hath promised, saying, Yet once more I shake not the earth only, but

also heaven. 27. *And this word, Yet once more, signifieth the removing of those things that are shaken, as of things that are made, that those things which cannot be shaken may remain.*

This great world and all its grandeur shall one day tremble as did Mount Sinai when God's glory rested on it. Our churches, our Bibles, our homes, are all but for a while ; they pass away as did the Jewish law. But there is something that cannot be shaken, and that is, a heart which loves God. Rough storms and shocks abound here below, but faith in God's mercy through Christ cannot be wholly overthrown. I feel in my affections, in my plans, in my frail body, such shocks and changes as come, and yet God is still mine and I am His. That stands firm.

28. *Wherefore we receiving a kingdom which cannot be moved, let us have grace, whereby we may serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear :*

God allows our service. He gives us many blessings and graces during this short life in pledge of that eternal kingdom which will one day be revealed. We are meant to delight in serving Him, only never forget the reverence that His Presence requires. How shocking in God's House, or at the altar, or in his own private prayers, is a Christian who has lost this reverence ! I know for myself that it is easy to lose, and hard to find again. Lord, keep ever in my mind what I am, and what Thou art, that I may behave rightly at prayer.

29. *For our God is a consuming fire.*

God and evil cannot exist together, any more than fire with wood or straw. He will consume all that offends His righteousness, either in us, or with us. May it be consumed in us, so that we ourselves may be pure and fit for His Presence, not with us in everlasting ruin. I desire, before it is too late, to have my eyes opened that I may see where I stand, and take my choice of God as my Friend, not my enemy, for evermore.

CHAPTER XIII.

- i. Divers admonitions, as to charity, 4. to honest life, 5. to avoid covetousness, 7. to regard God's preachers, 9. to take heed of strange doctrines, 10. to confess Christ, 16. to give alms, 17. to obey governors, 18. to pray for the apostle. 20. The conclusion.

LET brotherly love continue.

Brothers are required by nature to stand by each other, so we who

believe have many brethren to think of. All God's children must be dear to us for our heavenly Father's sake. If Jesus Christ is our Brother we shall love all whom He loves ; our kindness must be continuing, not a momentary feeling, but a lasting spring that never dries up.

2. Be not forgetful to entertain strangers : for thereby some have entertained angels unawares.

What is true hospitality? Not a lavish expense, much less any excess in eating or drinking, but the providing a sober and suitable refreshment for such as are in want, or who come to visit us. There are also many hospitals, missions, and other charities, by supporting which we help to entertain the sick and needy. We may welcome thus not only angels, but the Lord of Angels Himself.

3. Remember them that are in bonds, as bound with them ; and them which suffer adversity, as being yourselves also in the body.

These are sad and yet sweet words ; they picture to us hopeless sorrows, cases of ill-usage, pain, distress, those who have some great load to bear, and bid us remember that we, too, are frail and liable to suffer. Let our prayers, and visits, and alms help their needs ; so we shall not lack help in our troubles. There is a great mass of suffering in the world, but we may lighten much of it if we will.

4. Marriage is honourable in all, and the bed undefiled : but whoremongers and adulterers God will judge.

In Holy Scripture God has shewn us that marriage is His ordinance, and enjoys His blessing. By it dear children are given us to bring up for God. It saves us from many temptations with which young men and women are beset ; it trains us in mutual love and thought for each other's welfare. How great ruin those Christians bring on themselves who profane their marriage vows, and trample on purity and holy love !

5. Let your conversation be without covetousness ; and be content with such things as ye have : for he hath said, I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee.

Let us learn "the lowly lesson of content." God speaks to us as to our fathers in their day, and tells us He is with us still. If He is our portion we are not desolate ; if we enjoy His grace we are still rich. When He strips us of this world's goods we can say, "The Lord gave, and the Lord hath taken away." Those who love Him cannot lose their all.

6. So that we may boldly say, The Lord is my helper, and I will not fear what man shall do unto me.

I am sure that God is my Friend, and therefore I will receive all that comes thankfully at His hands. I will not let high estate or low, strength or weakness, riches or poverty, utterly overthrow my peace. Time, with all its changes, will soon be over, and eternity will shew me the reason of all God's dealings. Men and their malice pass away, but God remains for ever.

7. Remember them which have the rule over you, who have spoken unto you the word of God: whose faith follow, considering the end of their conversation.

Soldiers recount brave achievements, and so encourage themselves to dare the like, and shall not Christ's soldiers be encouraged by the pious lives and holy deaths of His saints? As our life is, so our end will be. Let us live in God's faith and fear, and the end, whenever and however it comes, will have nothing dreadful about it. Consider the end of a good Christian, and pray that your own may resemble it.

8. Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.

“ O Lord, the refuge and defence
Of all Thy chosen race,
From age to age Thou still hast been
Their sure abiding place ! ”

Jesus is still worthy of our fullest love and trust. He remains as mighty, as pure, as compassionate as He ever was. We shall find Him as true a Friend as did saints of old.

9. Be not carried about with divers and strange doctrines. For it is a good thing that the heart be established with grace; not with meats, which have not profited them that have been occupied therein.

The doctrine of grace is the old faith which was from the beginning. The gospel supposes in us a change from above, a Divine life, a help greater than man can give. No outward observances can supply the want of these inward gifts. Our weak hearts need Divine aid to strengthen them in this world of trial. Let us be true catholic Christians after the model of old times, and not run here and there for novelties.

10. We have an altar, whereof they have no right to eat which serve the tabernacle.

Christ our Sacrifice was offered for us once for all on the saving Cross,

and is now spiritually set forth to us at His holy Table. All Christians who repent of their sins and trust in His mercy have a right to approach and eat, but many turn their backs on the Sacrifice, and will not draw near. Let me, though love grows cold, and communicants are few, never miss my communions. What else can make up to me for the comfort and the grace which I enjoy there?

11. For the bodies of those beasts, whose blood is brought into the sanctuary by the high priest for sin, are burned without the camp. 12. Wherefore Jesus also, that he might sanctify the people with his own blood, suffered without the gate.

On the Jewish Day of Atonement no one, not even the high priest, partook of the flesh of the sin-offering ; it was burnt outside the camp. That sacrifice could not really reconcile for sins, or restore communion with God ; but we are allowed by faith to communicate in the atoning Sacrifice of Christ. We are sanctified by His Blood. He bore away our sins once for all, and yet came back to take us to heaven with Him.

13. Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.

It need not frighten us to be alone, or to be despised by men. Christ our Lord was cast out in death from the holy city ; He was numbered with the transgressors. Let us therefore, when He calls us, go out and join Him. His love will more than make up for the sacrifice of what this world holds dear. His shame is more glorious than the world's honour.

14. For here have we no continuing city, but we seek one to come.

Dear reader, ask yourself if you have sought earnestly for eternal rest. Have you laboured, prayed, watched, hoped for it ? This world's children labour earnestly for what they can find here ; their zeal rebukes the coldness of Christians in their search for that home of everlasting joy. When we reach it, sin and care and loss will all vanish away.

15. By him therefore let us offer the sacrifice of praise to God continually, that is, the fruit of our lips giving thanks to his name.

Our lips should be kept pure from foul or envious or bitter words, if we would rightly offer praise to God. Our words of God, or to God, are spoiled by the remembrance of many foolish words we have uttered at other times. Through our Saviour our hymns and prayers are accepted ; they ascend to God's Throne in spite of their

feebleness and coldness, yet they must be sincere, and we must desire to praise Him better.

16. But to do good and to communicate forget not : for with such sacrifices God is well pleased.

Our hands must offer a sacrifice too, that of help, and service, and alms. God would have them kept pure from evil, and employed in honest work. These two sacrifices of the lips and of the hands must go together. God would not be pleased with the one apart from the other. All we can do in praising Him or helping others seems indeed worthless, yet God's mercy welcomes it, and joins it to the perfect words and works of the Redeemer, and so it becomes precious.

17. Obey them that have the rule over you, and submit yourselves : for they watch for your souls, as they that must give account, that they may do it with joy, and not with grief : for that is unprofitable for you.

Obey those who are over you, care for those who are under you. Very few are set either at the highest pinnacle, or at the very base of society. Almost all of us have to submit reverently to some of higher place, and to watch tenderly over some inferiors in place or age. Let us look both up and down, respectfully to our superiors, yet observing God over us all, patiently and kindly on those who are beneath us, as intrusted to our care for a while by their Saviour, Who will ask us how we dealt with them.

18. Pray for us : for we trust we have a good conscience, in all things willing to live honestly.

If my conscience is stained with evil, and my will to do right very weak, then I have all the more need of my friends' prayers. Grant, Lord, that I may share in the prayers of Thy true servants here, and that those who have passed away from earth may still, if Thou willest, help me by their prayers in a better place, and after a more perfect manner than they could pray here below.

19. But I beseech you the rather to do this, that I may be restored to you the sooner.

Life is made up of meetings and partings. Our journeys represent to us the way we are going through this troublesome world towards heaven ; our meetings again shadow forth the joy of that moment when all who love God will meet to part no more. Restore us, O Lord, if it please Thee, to our home and friends and peace here ; yet if all these are beyond our reach, let our prayers and hopes be fixed on a surer home. No weariness, no bitterness, can enter there.

20. Now the God of peace, that brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant,

God's power is manifested to us in the Resurrection of Jesus Christ.

He came back from death, He burst those bonds which chain all mankind, His Blood had atoned for sin, and reconciled us to God ; what then will He not do for those who trust in Him ? Remember, His life is immortal, His care unceasing, His grace all-powerful ; though we are frail and vile, yet our Lord and Master is mighty to save.

21. Make you perfect in every good work to do his will, working in you that which is wellpleasing in his sight, through Jesus Christ ; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

Here is the mystery of grace. I must work, yet it is by God working in me. God wants no idle, slothful hands ; He tells us to work while it is day, yet this is only possible if His mercy shews us what to do, and enables us to do it. It is all of Him, and yet in a wonderful manner He is pleased to require the co-operation of our hearts and hands too. All our good works should be in this spirit, done through Christ, and by Divine help, and for God's glory, not our own. Thus only we shall accomplish any good.

22. And I beseech you, brethren, suffer the word of exhortation : for I have written a letter unto you in few words.

We who have studied this Epistle do not need these excuses. We have seen here Christ in His glory, and in His humiliation ; we have learnt the love and patience of saints ; we have trembled at awful warnings. This letter has raised us up towards God, and yet made us fear. How many persons in great trials or dangers have been strengthened by its gracious words ? The words are not many, yet we read them over and over ; they suffice for our life's comfort.

23. Know ye that our brother Timothy is set at liberty ; with whom, if he come shortly, I will see you. 24. Salute all them that have the rule over you, and all the saints. They of Italy salute you.

In these apostolic letters no notice is taken of the world's changes ; the writer's heart is set too much on the eternal welfare of Christians to give any news of the day. His heart and his readers' hearts are full of mutual love ; they shared in each others' joys and sorrows ; they felt as brethren though lands and seas divided them. What touched the Church was at their hearts, and they

thought other news less worth hearing. We are too apt to invert this order, and put trivial things first of all.

25. Grace be with you all. Amen.

What better wish could we end with? Grace be with us. Grace begins, continues, and completes our new life. Grace is Divine mercy, love beyond our merits, yet which Jesus Christ has won and bestowed richly on us. Let us never neglect any means of grace, whereby this heavenly gift may be more fully conveyed to our souls. We all need it, and need to increase in it.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JAMES.

CHAPTER I.

1. We are to rejoice under the cross, 5. to ask patience of God, 13. and in our trials not to impute our weakness, or sins, unto him, 19. but rather to hearken to the word, to meditate in it, and to do thereafter. 26. Otherwise men may seem, but never be truly religious.

JAMES, a servant of God and of the Lord Jesus Christ, to the twelve tribes which are scattered abroad, greeting.

He greets us, wherever we may chance to be, as our friend. Whatever be our nation, we yet belong, if we are Christians, to the true Israel, God's own chosen people who are in covenant with Him. The apostle has a message for us from His Divine Lord ; he delights to do His errands. His greeting expresses a wish for our comfort and peace here, for patience in trouble, for abundance of joy at last in our true country.

2. *My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations;*

Trials and distresses are only bitterness in the world's judgment, but Christ sends them on His chosen as desiring to bring great blessings through them. Indeed, if we chose for ourselves, we should not find in our path disappointments, in our body aches and pains, from our comrades vexation or ridicule. But our dear Lord, Who Himself went the way of the Cross, knows best what we need.

3. *Knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience.*

It is hard to find a full answer to the question, why our world is so full of sadness and evil, but for us ourselves it is a sufficient answer to reply that things are so to teach us patience, make us endure, deny ourselves, behave as soldiers under fire, as travellers in a dan-

gerous land. Fallen man needs to learn lessons which Eden could never teach him.

4. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing.

Jesus Christ bids us be perfect. He would fit us for His heavenly kingdom, would blot out all that has been amiss in us, would purify what is evil, make up what is lacking, enlighten what is dark. Is it strange then that His method should be hard to flesh and blood? There is a great work to be done before we can be changed after our heavenly pattern. Ah! dear friends, renewal from above is not the work of a moment, nor obtained without earnest seeking.

5. If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

This is the wisdom that we need ; wisdom to discern why trials are sent, and how to bear them, and what profit we can gain from them. Afflictions are God's messengers, but we need grace to understand their message. O Lord, make us persevere in prayer, turn our weak, formal supplications into such prayers as Thou wilt hear and answer.

6. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea driven with the wind and tossed. 7. For let not that man think that he shall receive any thing of the Lord.

In order to pray, besides the sense of your own need, which is the first requirement, a second and equally indispensable one is this, that you have a hearty confidence that God will give you all things that are needful. Plainly, He is goodness itself ; He has promised to hear us ; Christ our Saviour presents our requests ; it would be a piece of treason if we doubted either our Father's goodness or His power. Faith clings too fast to these truths for any doubts or fears to unsettle her.

8. A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

I serve two masters, I cherish two minds, I prostrate myself one while before God, and one while before the world. My whole life and aims and thoughts waver between earth and heaven. To see me at my prayers, or hear me speak of religion, any one would suppose I was a heavenly-minded person ; but the gust of vanity or the poisonous breath of evil comes over me, and makes me a slave to earth again. Thus I never make any progress.

9. Let the brother of low degree rejoice in that he is exalted :

He is admitted into the fellowship of Christ's sufferings, has the same condition that his Master had while on earth, is exalted before God and the angels.

" Be not afraid, ye little flock, though poor and profitless your lives,
Let not distrust your sorrows mock, a Father's love the kingdom gives."

10. But the rich, in that he is made low : because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. 11. For the sun is no sooner risen with a burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and the flower thereof falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth : so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways.

All that is most beautiful and bright soon vanishes. A short while ago other people wore fine clothes, had grand entertainments, enjoyed high position and consideration ; all things seemed at their disposal then ; now we seem to lord it over the world ; very soon our successors will come in our place. Lord, give us a sure resting-place in Thee ; let this transitory world not utterly dazzle or fascinate us while it lasts.

12. Blessed is the man that endureth temptation : for when he is tried, he shall receive the crown of life, which the Lord hath promised to them that love him.

What is the crown of life ? Something that will never fade nor grow old ; something complete, which lacks nothing ; a victory over evil ; a rest from trouble. It is for ourselves and our dear ones all that heart could wish, and much more than we know of as yet. Only let us persevere on God's side. Is not He the best of Friends ? Can any one be to us what He is ? The thought of His goodness will bear us through.

13. Let no man say when he is tempted, I am tempted of God : for God cannot be tempted with evil, neither tempteth he any man :

Our evils do not come from God. He means to us only good by what happens. His design is to give us greater purity and steadfastness. In His providence all that seems worst has its own place and order. To remember that His mercy is shining brightly behind the cloud helps us in dark days when storms of evil darken all our path.

14. But every man is tempted, when he is drawn away of his own lust, and enticed.

Alas ! the enemy is within ; neither the devil nor man can harm us

unless we consent. We need to watch our frail, weak hearts, and call upon Almighty power to help us in the hours of temptation. Indeed, this verse is but too true a description of the way that I have often been caught by the bait of sin. No one is too high, too wise, too religious, to be out of the way of temptation.

15. Then when lust hath conceived, it bringeth forth sin : and sin, when it is finished, bringeth forth death.

Evil desires produce acts of sin ; sinful acts produce a death of the soul. All high hopes, devout feelings, good resolutions perish, and despair or hardness of heart takes their place. Yet, Lord, Thou art my Saviour, and able to guard me, nay, to raise me from the dead. Thou art the Victor to overcome temptation, the Sacrifice to atone for my sins, the true Life to quicken me. I have need of all Thy mercy.

16. Do not err, my beloved brethren. 17. Every good gift and every perfect gift is from above, and cometh down from the Father of lights, with whom is no variableness, neither shadow of turning.

It would be a great mistake to refer evil to God, or to refer good to any one except Him. All good gifts of mind and body, still more all the comforts and blessings of grace, are from our heavenly Father ; men are but His instruments to convey them to us. Do not look to yourself for any good, any strength, any light, but lift up your eyes to God, Who knows no night, and shines into the darkest places.

18. Of his own will begat he us with the word of truth, that we should be a kind of first-fruits of his creatures.

Divine mercy has made us Christians ; nay more, has often borne with us, guarded us from evil, strengthened us with new life. We enjoy many graces and helps. God would have us live up to this holy calling. His design was to make us holy. He has given us opportunities which are denied to many. Let us reckon with shame how far we fall short of the Divine purpose.

19. Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath :

Here are three useful rules for our sanctification : (1) Be eager and ready to learn. God speaks many ways—in Scripture, in the Church, through wise men or books. Let us be sure to catch His voice and apprehend what He would tell us. (2) Choose silence rather than over-hasty speech. Many words rush to the tongue which we should be wiser to keep back. (3) Above all, check movements of anger. How soon all peace and comfort and grace

are driven away amidst contentions ! It is exceedingly worth while to repress our natural quickness of temper, which disposes us to be upset at any accident.

20. For the wrath of man worketh not the righteousness of God.

Alas, if seekers after truth had always kept this verse in mind, how different would Church history have been ! We cannot speak for God, or discern His truth, or uproot error, if we come to the work with anger in our hearts and on our lips. Man so easily puts on a passionate temper, and fancies that it is all pure zeal for truth. Remember that God is love, and unloving hearts cannot do His business.

21. Wherefore lay apart all filthiness and superfluity of naughtiness, and receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls.

God sows His Word within us ; our hearts are the soil. He would have plants of grace, fruits of holy love, spring up there. Beware lest you choke that heavenly growth with the thorns of care or pleasure, lest you let sinful passion uproot it. Salvation is so glorious a gift that all this world's promises must seem little in comparison. It would be a poor exchange to gain earth and lose heaven.

22. But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves.

Christ the Lord bestowed the greatest honour on those who do His Father's Will. He equalled them with His nearest and dearest ones. This is true religion, this is profitable knowledge. Alas for us who have heard so much good and put so little into practice !

23. For if any be a hearer of the word, and not a doer, he is like unto a man beholding his natural face in a glass : 24. for he beholdeth himself, and goeth his way, and straightway forgetteth what manner of man he was.

For a moment he saw God and saw himself. He saw what holiness was, what vice was, what were duties, dangers, promises. Then he went out and forgot all this gracious sight, and plunged blindly into the care and follies of earth again. O Lord, when Thy mirror has been offered to us, and the sight of ourselves and of Thee set forth there has won our gaze, we beseech Thee, keep us looking. Let us not put away that spectacle, but return to it again and again.

25. But whoso looketh into the perfect law of liberty, and

continueth therein, he being not a forgetful hearer, but a doer of the work, this man shall be blessed in his deed.

Look into God's Word and continue studying it, but let your study turn to practice. It has infinite depths, blessings, encouragements, and is well worthy of our whole attention. Great things are said in Scripture of the Jewish law, and of its enlightening power, but the gospel deserves far more praise ; it shows us our true selves and God's mercy, and gives us grace to live accordingly.

26. If any man among you seem to be religious, and bridleth not his tongue, but deceiveth his own heart, this man's religion is vain.

Here is false devotion. It talks, rather than acts ; it loves to proclaim pious feelings, to lay down the law about holy things, to judge other men ; it is full of words about religion. What an easy way of deceiving ourselves is this ! God would have us check our tongues when we desire to speak on sacred subjects. A few words are better than many.

27. Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world.

Here is true devotion. It practises mercy and keeps purity. God give us tender hearts to feel for and help the distressed, and brave hearts to withstand corruption. There are two worlds : one which is poor, afflicted, out of sight, neglected, that one we should seek out and make friends with ; and another which is noisy, prosperous, idle, careless, and lords it over men, that one we should keep away from. Lord, make us Christians after this true and sincere pattern which Thy apostle here lays down.

CHAPTER II.

1. It is not agreeable to Christian profession to regard the rich, and to despise the poor brethren : 13. rather we are to be loving, and merciful : 14. and not to boast of faith where no deeds are, 17. which is but a dead faith, 19. the faith of devils, 21. not of Abraham, 25. and Rahab.

MY brethren, have not the faith of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, with respect of persons.

Christ is the Lord of glory ; His kingdom, His gifts, His majesty, excel all that this world can shew. Those who fix their minds on the glory of their Lord will not easily be enslaved by the shadows

of human glory which move across our little stage of life. This world's honour and this world's failures will alike be redressed by a mighty Hand whose disposal we await.

2. For if there come unto your assembly a man with a gold ring, in goodly apparel, and there come in also a poor man in vile raiment ; 3. and ye have respect to him that weareth the gay clothing, and say unto him, Sit thou here in a good place ; and say to the poor, Stand thou there, or sit here under my footstool :

In God's House all believers should be equal. The poor man should be at home in his heavenly Father's Presence, should enter freely to hear His Word and sing His praises. The rich and mighty should find there something to remind them that they too are flesh and blood, and must ere long be dust and ashes. The Church is the great teacher of equality : not that we ought to upset the natural distinctions which exist amongst men, but to remember that they are only for a very little while, and are of a very little profit.

4. Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts ?

Look deeper than the outward dress. Consider that God may have great designs for poor humble persons, and that those who seem to lord it over the world may be absolutely nothing in His eyes. It is a poor, weak, shallow kind of judgment to respect the wealthy and successful, applaud them, treat them with politeness, and meanwhile be harsh, overbearing, and inconsiderate for common people. Lord, preserve Thy servants from this one-sided dealing.

5. Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him ?

Many poor became Christians, few rich people did so. Jesus Christ was Himself poor, chose poor men for His friends, required poverty of spirit from all His servants. God offered grace, heavenly glory, Divine treasures, to those who love Him under the gospel, but said not a word of rewarding them with money or land. All such thoughts correct the balance of the world, and incline us to look among humble people for high examples of Christian grace.

6. But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats ? 7. Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called ?

The worthy Name of Christ has been invoked upon us. We were signed with the Cross, enlisted as His faithful soldiers. Our sins

will bring shame on that Name, and will swell the tide of mockery with which His enemies greet it. Which side shall we take, that of those who abhor, or of those who love, the Saviour? In these days many are found who treat Him with contempt and hatred, to whom His Table, His Word, His Sacraments, are a subject only for scorn.

8. If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:

The law of love is a royal law, because it is first of all, it knows no exceptions, it includes all other rules under it. The King of kings Himself, while on earth, taught it and shewed it forth in His life. Those who take this rule to guide them are in the right way towards His kingdom. May He enable us to make this the spirit of our life.

9. But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors.

Yet charity itself bids us shew respect to those who are over us, be courteous and considerate, pay all persons that deference which they expect. True, but do this as discerning Christ the Lord in others; honour and serve them for His sake, behave to rich and poor as He would have you. The thoughts of God's majesty, His holy law, His Divine Redemption, kept deep within our hearts, preserve us from being servile, or from being surly. We know then how to behave.

10. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. 11. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law.

Indeed my good deeds cannot atone for my bad ones. I dare not say to God, Overlook my misdeeds in this or that matter because I have served Thee well in other points. Oh no, there can be no such bargaining between God and us. His law is love, and if we break it in any point we spoil our whole standing in His sight. One wilful sin infects prayers, and feelings, and life; all that was so peaceful turns to misery then. Thank God, there is One Who makes atonement for our sins; how should we escape otherwise?

12. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty.

Yes, do not forget that Christ is a Master as well as a Redeemer. He ordains duties, offers rewards, proclaims His Will. Indeed His law is holy, spiritual, divine, quite different from a mere list of

outward observances. It is rooted within, and depends on Divine grace to fulfil it. Still it is a law, and requires our obedience. The Lord will judge us according to our works.

13. For he shall have judgment without mercy, that hath shewed no mercy ; and mercy rejoiceth against judgment.

What will the revengeful do who pardon nothing? What will those rich men do who store up all their goods, or spend them on themselves? A day is coming when God will try all our lives, and discover endless defects in us. Only the merciful will find mercy then. Here is the way to render the Judge favourable : treat His friends with kindness, seek to forgive and give up, and so cover your own transgressions by extending pardon to your brethren.

14. What doth it profit, my brethren, though a man say he hath faith, and have not works ? can faith save him ?

This is the faith of those who said they believed in God and in Jesus Christ, but there it ended. There was no sign of love or holiness about their lives to correspond with their profession. Many Christians rest contentedly in this barren kind of religion, but in the day of trouble they will find no help in it; it will not sustain them against temptation, nor bring them safely through the Judgment Day.

15. If a brother or sister be naked, and destitute of daily food, 16. and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled ; notwithstanding ye gave them not those things which are needful to the body ; what doth it profit ?

Such empty words would be a mere show of charity without the reality. Just so hymns and creeds and Bible phrases would be a mere show of Christianity if there were no spiritual life behind them. Unless we keep the first Baptismal promise, to renounce the devil, the world, and the flesh, it would be little use to have declared, in the second one, that we believe all the articles of the Christian faith.

17. Even so faith, if it hath not works, is dead, being alone.

This is a different faith from that which justifies, and which works by love, and which obtained a good report in the saints. This kind of faith is not the substance of things hoped for, or the proof of things unseen. No ; it is a mere assent to truth without any love for it ; it is a profession and acknowledgment of God's Word which we make and then forget again. It is, alas ! the condition of many who call themselves Christians. God keep us from it.

18. Yea, a man may say, Thou hast faith, and I have

works : shew me thy faith without thy works, and I will shew thee my faith by my works.

Just so Christ our Saviour shewed His power of spiritual healing by the outward evidence of curing the body. True religion is indeed inward and spiritual, but it needs to come forth and shew itself in a visible form. Good works are its outward dress, its fruits, its voice. Here we see evidence that the soul within has been changed from above.

19. *Thou believest that there is one God ; thou doest well : the devils also believe, and tremble.*

Here is religious knowledge, yet no love with it, no hope, no purity. I earnestly desire not to believe after such a fashion as that. Devils know a great deal about God's ways ; they see the effects of sin, they could answer many questions that puzzle us, and yet they stand outside it all, hating and fearing it.

20. *But wilt thou know, O vain man, that faith without works is dead ? 21. Was not Abraham our Father justified by works, when he had offered Isaac his son upon the altar ?*

God asked of Abraham not a mere profession in words, but to give up what he loved best. God tried him to prove whether he would obey when all the blessings, all the promises, seemed at stake. When that voice is heard by us, bidding us part with what we cherish most, shall we have the courage to give it up, rather than disobey Him ?

22. *Seest thou how faith wrought with his works, and by works was faith made perfect ? 23. And the scripture was fulfilled which saith, Abraham believed God, and it was imputed unto him for righteousness : and he was called the Friend of God.*

Of such God makes His friends, accounts them righteous, shews them His ways, gives a blessing to many for their sake. What a great word this is, that the Almighty, Everlasting God should link frail mortal souls to Himself in a tie of friendship ! How true a Friend God is ! what treasures He has for His chosen ! He will abundantly repay them for all they have given up for Him.

24. *Ye see then, how that by works a man is justified, and not by faith only.*

Indeed it is plain. Abraham offered the most literal proof of his obedience. He was willing to give up all that he loved best when God required it. Such faith should ours be, that is content to live a pilgrim life here on earth, keeps from evil ways, resigns itself

wholly into God's hands, and lives on His promises. Abraham shewed what he believed by what he did. How can we be true Christians on any other conditions?

25. Likewise also was not Rahab the harlot justified by works, when she had received the messengers, and had sent them out another way?

Rahab took God's side. Not only did she profess belief in Him, but she sheltered His servants, and risked the anger of her own countrymen by so doing. We profess to believe in the great power and marvellous works of our God; let us prove our sincerity by forwarding His cause, helping His servants, contributing to His victory over the world. One day He will overthrow evil, and reward those who have trusted in Him.

26. For as the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without works is dead also.

A lifeless body is a woful sight to us. So is in God's eyes a mere correct profession with no reality. Faith without works means the religion of those Christians who acknowledge the creed and commandments, and yet live for pleasure, for covetousness, for this world's honours; they have no care for heavenly things, all their soul is taken up with earth. What a miserable sham their religion is! no strength in it while they live, and no comfort when they come to die.

CHAPTER III.

1. We are not rashly or arrogantly to reprove others: 5. but rather to bridle the tongue, a little member, but a powerful instrument of much good, and great harm. 13. They who be truly wise be mild, and peaceable, without envying, and strife.

MY brethren, be not many masters, knowing that we shall receive the greater condemnation.

To instruct and guide souls is a work of great responsibility. Many take it up rashly, forgetting that they have to answer for other men's faults, and for neglected souls, and for Christ's precious Blood wasted. To speak on religious subjects is apt to harden the heart. O Lord, if we have to speak for Thee, make us learn from Thee first in all humility; keep us from harming ourselves while we are edifying others.

2. For in many things we offend all. If any man offend

not in word, the same is a perfect man, and able also to bridle the whole body.

If all ought to keep watch over their words, pastors much more, because they have to speak of heavenly things, and their words are watched and weighed by men. If a light, irreverent remark, or a loose joke, or words that betray conceit, or jealousy, or ambition, fall from a priest's lips, they are remembered and brought up again and again.

3. Behold, we put bits in the horses' mouths, that they may obey us ; and we turn about their whole body. 4. Behold also the ships, which though they be so great, and are driven of fierce winds, yet are they turned about with a very small helm, whithersoever the governor listeth.

Therefore an ungoverned tongue is like a runaway horse that has taken the bit in his teeth, or like a ship that has lost her rudder. Then the horse is mischievous and dangerous ; then the ship is at the mercy of winds and waves. How shall we guide others aright who cannot guide ourselves ?

5. Even so the tongue is a little member, and boasteth great things. Behold, how great a matter a little fire kindleth !

Much speaking springs commonly from pride. We persuade ourselves that we know a great deal, take delight in our own wisdom, and endeavour by repeating it to impress it on other men's minds, and so make them feel that they need information from us. This is the real source of most of the folly, the irreverence, the jealousy, the corruption, that comes through foolish talking.

6. And the tongue is a fire, a world of iniquity : so is the tongue among our members, that it defileth the whole body, and setteth on fire the course of nature ; and it is set on fire of hell.

Yet the Holy Spirit came down with tongues of fire, and enables the tongue of wise preachers to kindle heavenly fire within us. True, but the fire here spoken of is the fire of a conflagration which is set alight by some cruel or hasty word, and consumes peace and truth and love out of the lives of men. A real blaze stops when fuel is exhausted, but this kind of consuming flame always finds fuel, and is beyond any man's power to check.

7. For every kind of beasts, and of birds, and of serpents, and of things in the sea, is tamed, and hath been tamed of mankind : 8. but the tongue can no man tame ; it is an unruly evil, full of deadly poison.

My tongue is likely to play me many tricks ; it is like an unruly beast, like some poisonous creature. When I least intend I may suddenly utter some foolish or evil word which will do grievous harm. I have often said things I would give a great deal afterwards to have left unsaid. Lord, help me by Thy grace to restrain this unruly member ; may I accustom it to utter only what is wise and pure and upright. Thou alone canst accomplish this in me.

9. *Therewith bless we God, even the Father ; and therewith curse we men, which are made after the similitude of God.*
 10. *Out of the same mouth proceedeth blessing and cursing. My brethren, these things ought not so to be.*

Speak willingly of God and of His love and goodness ; yet even this with reverence, fearing to speak amiss. Rather take pleasure in listening to what others say in His praise. Speak little of thy neighbour or of what concerns him, unless an opportunity offers to say something to his credit. Speak as little as possible about thyself. Consider often the extreme dangers which beset a talkative person, and the great benefit of silence.

11. *Doth a fountain send forth at the same place sweet water and bitter ? 12. Can the fig tree, my brethren, bear olive berries ? either a vine, figs ? so can no fountain both yield salt water and fresh.*

These figures mean that slander is unnatural ; it is rebuked by the trees, by the streams, by the creatures that do their appointed work and produce after their kind. It is man's nature to love what is good and hate what is evil. Those who delight in evil are monsters in God's world. Christ the Lord came to renew and perfect our nature, not to destroy it.

13. *Who is a wise man and endued with knowledge among you ? let him shew out of a good conversation his works with meekness of wisdom.*

Those who teach their brethren must be wise, must study Holy Scripture and the writings of learned men. Yes, but this wisdom is not meant to encourage mere barren pride ; such persons must be first in humility, must practise what they preach, must willingly serve their brethren and humble themselves. True wisdom is content to take up common duties ; it is patient, diligent, and willing to remain in the shade.

14. *But if ye have bitter envying and strife in your hearts, glory not, and lie not against the truth.*

It would be a most false pretence to claim credit for wisdom while strife and envy ruled within. S. James seems to protest against

almost all controversy ; he felt its dangers, he saw its evils. To him the best theology was a holy life ; the best argument to convince any one a meek and gentle behaviour. He deemed that God's truth lay deep within the believer's heart, and showed itself by a life of love.

15. This wisdom descendeth not from above, but is earthly, sensual, devilish. 16. For envying and strife is, there is confusion and every evil work.

Alas, how much evil has been wrought in the Church of Christ by this kind of spirit ! The world, the flesh, and the devil, often assume the form of wisdom ; they speak fair, they produce admirable writings, profess lofty sentiments. But the Christian is on his guard. Once the evil one appeared to S. Martin in a glorious shape, full of beauty and grandeur, professing to be Christ Himself ; but S. Martin asked for the print of the nails. He would not believe it was Christ, because there was no sign of the Cross there.

17. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, and easy to be intreated, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality, and without hypocrisy.

O Divine Wisdom, Who didst once shew Thyself on the earth and converse with men, teach us to recognise this same character in Thy saints, and ourselves to seek it. As the rainbow is made up of many accordant colours, so the life of Jesus, our dear Lord, presents us with all these excellences in perfect harmony. In His sacred character there is this "sweet harmonious strife" between mercy, purity, and truth.

18. And the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace of them that make peace.

Without peace, all is spoilt ; high gifts will be wasted, right faith be barren and empty. Would that, in these days of bitter strife and division, all Christians would meditate on this delightful verse. No church privileges, no stately worship, nor active zeal, will fulfil our hopes unless a love of peace is there. Without peace the crop of blessings will never come up.

CHAPTER IV.

1. We are to strive against covetousness, 4. intemperance, 5. pride, 11. detraction, and rash judgment of others: 13. and not to be confident in the good success of worldly business, but mindful ever of the uncertainty of this life, to commit ourselves and all our affairs to God's providence.

FROM whence come wars and fightings among you? come they not hence, even of your lusts that war in your members?

Here is the secret of strife and division. It comes of passions indulged; they lord it over our corrupt hearts, and carry on a warfare there against God's holy law. Our pride, jealousy, evil desire, are so many robbers, each with his murderous band, who attack us and steal peace and love away.

2. *Ye lust, and have not: ye kill, and desire to have, and cannot obtain: ye fight and war, yet ye have not, because ye ask not.* 3. *Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts.*

Some make no prayers, but seek what they want by sinful means. Others pray, but yet desire their own will and pleasure, not God's. Their prayer is merely a kind of selfishness, and altogether omits "Thy Will, not mine, be done." God's peace is for those who love His holy law, who submit their wills to His, and who pray first of all for grace and strength to serve Him.

4. *Ye adulterers and adulteresses, know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God? whosoever therefore will be a friend of the world is the enemy of God.*

Adulterous souls are those who break their pledged faith to God. He espoused us, took us for His own, desired our whole affection. Do you suppose that He looks on indifferently when we put some other in His place? Be sure that His love is sufficient for you. He is full of all mercy and grace, while the world's love is ruinous at last. Lord, give me loyalty of heart; let me have no dealings with Thy enemy. I desire to be Thine above all.

5. *Do ye think that the scripture saith in vain, The spirit that dwelleth in us lusteth to envy?*

God's Spirit earnestly seeks our love. He is a jealous God. The last words in this verse should be rather "desireth passionately."

Think what these grave words express of the extreme love of our God for us, and His horror when souls leave Him and choose the world's love instead. Unfaithfulness to God is the rejecting our best Friend.

6. But he giveth more grace. Wherefore he saith, God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble.

God loves us, and gives us grace to love Him in turn, if we humbly ask Him for it. His grace means here a heart to love Him, a sense of His goodness. Indeed, He is full of all excellence, but the proud heart is taken up with the splendours and grandeur of this world, and so passes by God, while the humble stops and adores Him.

7. Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you.

Yes, submit to God, but resist Satan. A Christian is full of humble thoughts of his own frailty, seeks for guidance, is content to follow, not lead. But he knows how to say "No." He stands up bravely when mercy and truth and purity are in question. Teach us, Lord, how to join together a modest, humble behaviour with plenty of courage when temptation comes.

8. Draw nigh to God, and he will draw nigh to you. Cleanse your hands, ye sinners; and purify your hearts, ye double-minded.

Drawing nigh to God is the description of a Christian's life. He approaches God in prayer, in repentance, is mindful of His Presence, seeks for daily gifts from Him. God drawing nigh to us is the description of all His merciful dealings with the soul. He speaks, He blesses, He comforts, He makes His Presence known to such as desire it. Only we cannot have this rich experience and love sin too ; the two cannot go together.

9. Be afflicted, and mourn, and weep: let your laughter be turned to mourning, and your joy to heaviness. 10. Humble yourselves in the sight of the Lord, and he shall lift you up.

This is the meaning of Lent. It is good for us to give up pleasures, to deny ourselves (so that this be done quietly and without ostentation). God would have us face the reality of sin and the nearness of His judgment. It is true, I am but "a sinner in a life of care," and all around me are fallen souls and terrible warnings. My own life's history is a very humiliating record.

11. Speak not evil one of another, brethren. He that speaketh evil of his brother, and judgeth his brother, speaketh evil of

the law, and judgeth the law: but if thou judge the law, thou art not a doer of the law, but a judge.

How can we be trusted to judge our neighbour's character? we are such prejudiced, partial judges. There is so much rivalry between us that it is almost impossible to be quite fair. Then, too, we know so little of his heart and his motives. Indeed, sometimes we are obliged to pass judgment upon open sin, or to expose hypocrites. True; but what extreme caution, what compassion and patience, are needed to do this rightly. We must not usurp God's judgment throne, but speak as fellow-sinners.

12. There is one lawgiver, who is able to save and to destroy: who art thou that judgest another?

The remembrance of God's Presence, which is a wholesome check upon us in all other ways, is peculiarly helpful to keep our tongues in order. God is near: He alone knows consciences; He passes judgment upon any idle word; all things that I say are written down in His book. I have enough to be answerable for in my own follies, without anticipating the sentence that other men shall receive.

13. Go to now, ye that say, To day or to morrow we will go into such a city, and continue there a year, and buy and sell, and get gain: 14. whereas ye know not what shall be on the morrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour, that appeareth for a little time, and then vanisheth away.

Our life is compared in Scripture to a drop of water, or a grain of sand, or a spark of fire, or (as here) to a morning mist that lies on the fields a little while, and then is gone, we know not how or where. Our great plans, lofty buildings, rich fortunes, rest on an absolutely uncertain foundation, our own health and life, which no one can answer for. Wise men will lay up a sure foundation in heaven; nothing on earth will last.

15. For that ye ought to say, If the Lord will, we shall live, and do this, or that.

So S. Paul used to say (Acts xviii. 21), "I will return again to you, if God will." Not that we need always say this aloud, much less utter it in an ostentatious manner, but that it should be always present to our minds. Still, it is a good thing to accustom ourselves in conversation distinctly to recognise God's providence, and our entire dependence on Him. We, and all that belongs to us, are in His merciful hands. Why should we be ashamed to say so?

16. But now ye rejoice in your boastings: all such rejoicing is evil.

When any one boasted of his strength, his luck, his success, the heathen believed that he made the gods jealous, and that they would send some sudden ruin upon him. Without thinking that, Christians yet abhor proud, self-confident speech. There is an extreme inconsistency between such words and our frail, uncertain life.

17. Therefore to him that knoweth to do good, and doeth it not, to him it is sin.

Lord, Thou hast shewn me Thy true faith, hast given me holy examples, calls to charity, devotion, humility. Woe to me if I only turn this rich abundance of privileges to my own harm. What a miserable thing it is to have a Christian's faith and a heathen's life together !

CHAPTER V.

1. Wicked rich men are to fear God's vengeance. 7. We ought to be patient in afflictions, after the example of the prophets, and Job : 12. to forbear swearing, 13. to pray in adversity, to sing in prosperity : 16. to acknowledge mutually our several faults, to pray one for another, 19. and to reduce a straying brother to the truth.

*G*O to now, ye rich men, weep and howl for your miseries that shall come upon you.

James had great tenderness for the poor, and it pierced his heart to see the rich neglect and oppress them. He desired to awaken these latter to repentance, and so he cried with a loud voice. A self-indulgent life lulls conscience to sleep, and it needs a great cry like this to awaken it. How awful will be the condition at God's judgment-seat of those who enjoyed all things carelessly while on earth !

2. Your riches are corrupted, and your garments are moth-eaten.

Rich clothes and splendid furniture are worth nothing in the day of trouble. Nay, it is hard for a Christian to join together a penitent, humble heart, with much of outward splendour. Consider the great brotherhood of suffering humanity who live on narrow means, amidst poor surroundings, and see what you can do to shew your fellowship with them.

3. Your gold and silver is cankered; and the rust of them shall be a witness against you, and shall eat your flesh as it were fire. Ye have heaped treasure together for the last days.

God meant you to hand on His gifts ; they spoil if heaped up only for your own selfish enjoyment. Gold and silver do not literally rust, but what is meant is that they turn to our own misery if hoarded ; they harden our hearts, make us anxious and wretched, while if liberally used they make many happy, ourselves included. Heap up kind deeds, charities, grateful memories,—this will be a real treasure.

4. Behold, the hire of the labourers who have reaped down your fields, which is of you kept back by fraud, crieth : and the cries of them which have reaped are entered into the ears of the Lord of sabaoth.

God's ancient law had in it extreme care for the rights of labourers, and denounced vengeance on those who oppressed them. Remember that your duty to your workmen or servants does not end with punctual payment of their wages. He has set you over them for a little while, to shew them kindness, good example, to help their souls and bodies. Very soon, indeed, you will stand beside them on an entire level before God's majesty. "The Lord alone shall be exalted in that day."

5. Ye have lived in pleasure on the earth, and been wanton ; ye have nourished your hearts, as in a day of slaughter.

Awake ! this life is not meant for perpetual pleasure-seeking. God calls to repentance. The Church says, "Watch and pray." Remember that it is dangerous for the soul to live long in a constant round of amusements. The spiritual part of us starves, prayer and Scripture (the true nourishment from heaven) are neglected. Ah, what attention, what careful prayers, what striving is needed for those to cling to God who live amidst many opportunities of dissipation !

6. Ye have condemned and killed the just ; and he doth not resist you.

How extraordinarily God's judgments will reverse many judgments of men ! Here right often yields to might, and oppression bears down the weak, but at the last day we shall stand most in awe of

" Souls a-wronged, and called to fill
With dread the men that used them ill,
When might shall yield to right as pliant
As a dwarf afore a giant."

7. Be patient therefore, brethren, unto the coming of the Lord. Behold, the husbandman waiteth for the precious fruit of the earth, and hath long patience for it, until he receive the early and latter rain.

The farmer ventures his seed, trusting in an ample return to come ; he lays all things ready for God's gracious sun and rain to do the work ; he waits patiently for many months before the harvest. Let us in like manner venture all on God's promises, prepare hearts round us for His grace, work hard in His service. One day we shall see the fruit of our labour.

8. Be ye also patient ; establish your hearts : for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh.

It is just as certain as harvest-time. Indeed, winter seems to last long, frost and snow reign, the crops seem to make no progress, yet at last summer returns to our fields and gardens. So the dear Lord will return to reward our labour, to ripen the seed we have sown, to bring us peace and joy for all our tears. Ah, do not lose the sowing-time, do not be cast down by the long winter ; one day you will forget all trouble, or remember it only with thankfulness.

9. Grudge not one against another, brethren, lest ye be condemned : behold, the judge standeth before the door.

God meant annoyances and disappointments to turn to your good. Do not turn them to your harm by impatience. One is at hand who will allot each his own recompense. Soon the door will open which now hides the unseen world from us. Our eyes will behold then the face of our Judge. May it be to us a countenance of grace and mercy. May He forgive the wilful, presumptuous impatience which has so often usurped His place.

10. Take, my brethren, the prophets, who have spoken in the name of the Lord, for an example of suffering affliction, and of patience.

The prophets were those who in old time spoke in God's Name, pleaded with corrupt kings and people, stood up as witnesses for God against prevailing irreligion. God gave them many gifts, many glimpses of future mercies ; they were His chosen friends ; and yet they had rough times, were despised, beaten, imprisoned, often put to death. Such thoughts help to keep us patient under the extreme inequalities of this world.

11. Behold, we count them happy which endure. Ye have heard of the patience of Job, and have seen the end of the Lord ; that the Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.

Job had great losses and sufferings, yet he did not lose his faith. At last God crowned Him with prosperity again. We may be sure that those who trust in God are never deserted. If He does not give them back this world's blessings, He has other and better for

them. Lord, when our day of trial comes, give us comfort and strength to rise above nature. If it be Thy Will to give us a share of Thy Cross, let it turn to an entrance for us into Thy glory.

12. But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.

How many make no scruple of introducing the holy Name of God lightly into their conversation ! They call Him to witness ; they appeal to sacred things, and stake their salvation on the truth of what they say. S. James had his mind full of our Lord's sermon on the mount, so he recalls the prohibition against swearing which the Lord Jesus gave therein. Neither our Lord nor S. James meant to forbid men gravely attesting the truth of their evidence on a solemn occasion ; they blame only an impatient, profane use of oaths, which is too common amongst us.

13. Is any among you afflicted? let him pray. Is any merry? let him sing psalms.

May I avoid too great concern and sadness, lest I become wholly cast down ; my prayers will help me to pass through such dark hours. May I avoid too light and careless mirth, lest I offend God ; hymns and songs will help me to express my happiness rightly. Sometimes my way is in darkness, sometimes in sunshine ; but let it be a straight path towards heaven, whether gloomy or bright.

14. Is any sick among you? let him call for the elders of the church; and let them pray over him, anointing him with oil in the name of the Lord: 15. and the prayer of faith shall save the sick, and the Lord shall raise him up; and if he have committed sins, they shall be forgiven him.

Yet priests did not long retain the power of raising up the sick by anointing them with oil ; their prayers and ministry availed in old time for miraculous healing, but now we send for them to minister to the sick soul only. Priests can help us in sickness in so far as they lead us to the Lord of all mercy and set us before Him. He is the Fountain of all gifts both for body and soul. If He raises us up again, praise to His holy Name ; nor less praise, if the body perishes, so long as the inward man is renewed by true repentance.

16. Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

Indeed

"More things are wrought by prayer
Than this world dreams of."

Reason tells us that God knows all things, and that all is ordered from eternity by His wise laws. Yes, but faith bids us pray, shews us God ready to listen, tells us of wonderful answers to prayers, reminds us how we ourselves have experienced God's answering. If we know that it has been so, then we take courage to commend afresh ourselves and our friends to God's loving care.

17. *Elias was a man subject to like passions as we are, and he prayed earnestly that it might not rain: and it rained not on the earth by the space of three years and six months.* 18. *And he prayed again, and the heaven gave rain, and the earth brought forth her fruit.*

Elijah was all alone against an idolatrous nation, but he had power through his intense faith in the true God. Nature itself waited on his prayers. He brought down first judgment and then mercy. These two verses refresh our faith; we learn to look behind the great veil of natural laws and see there the living God, ordering all things, bringing out His people's salvation, caring for each soul. He hears our prayers, even though all seems against us.

19. *Brethren, if any of you do err from the truth, and one convert him; 20. let him know, that he which converteth the sinner from the error of his way shall save a soul from death, and shall hide a multitude of sins.*

Oh what mercy, that Jesus Christ should give us a share in His saving work! Consider what deadly sin is, how much worse is the death of the soul than bodily ailment, and see what a gracious work the Lord gives to brave and tender hearts to do. Here are our dear brethren, redeemed by Christ's Blood, heirs of heaven, yet on the way to all ruin and misery. It is for us to hold out our hands and win them back. What trouble and pains can be too great to win such a result as this? What blessings will come to us through our helping sinners to repent!

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF PETER.

CHAPTER I.

1. He blesseth God for his manifold spiritual graces : 10. shewing that the salvation in Christ is no news, but a thing prophesied of old : 13. and exhorteth them accordingly to a godly conversation, forasmuch as they are now born anew by the word of God.

PETER, *an apostle of Jesus Christ, to the strangers scattered throughout Pontus, Galatia, Cappadocia, Asia, and Bithynia,*

These were known to God, though strangers, and scattered on earth. The apostle comforts them with thoughts of their true home. The Lord Jesus had bidden him strengthen his brethren, had given him charge to feed His sheep, and this epistle shews him fulfilling such commands. We shall find here some extremely precious recollections of Jesus Christ, and comforts for those who suffer.

2. *Elect according to the foreknowledge of God the Father, through sanctification of the Spirit, unto obedience and sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ: Grace unto you, and peace be multiplied.*

Should those who have been chosen by God, sanctified by His Spirit, washed in Christ's Blood, return to live amidst the swine again? God chose us to obedience and to purity ; He desires our whole hearts. If we serve Him He will give us abundant grace and peace here, and somewhat far better, which words cannot describe, in the life to come.

3. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, which according to his abundant mercy hath begotten us again unto a lively hope by the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead,*

The apostle had such things to tell of that the very thought and hope of them made him break out into exclamations of joy. Our creation entered us on the chequered road of mortal life, with its joys and cares and mingled prospects, but our new birth in Christ makes us heirs of much greater hopes. Our Saviour rose from the dead to shew us something above nature, a greater mercy, mightier power, brighter hope than this world's experience knows.

4. To an inheritance incorruptible, and undefiled, and that fadeth not away, reserved in heaven for you,

Something there is which we shall never lose, find no fault with, see no decay in. Those who have ventured earthly hopes and joys to obtain that eternal gift will find they have done wisely. Earth's best possessions do not stay with us long, and bring no very perfect happiness while we have them ; but, thank God, we know of something better.

5. Who are kept by the power of God through faith unto salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

Our God has promised to keep the heavenly treasure for us, and to guard us till we reach it. Our enemy indeed is strong, and uses his best efforts to make us captive and slay us. But our God is far mightier : He dwells with us ; He keeps the souls of believers. Ah, dear Lord, I know my own exceeding frailty and the strength of temptation ; yet I have not lost hold of Thy gracious promises.

6. Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations :

Here is a mixture of joy and sorrow in a Christian's heart. Joy because of God's great mercies and promises ; sorrow because of pains, temptations, afflictions. So long as we live on earth the joy cannot quite extinguish the pain, nor the pain kill the joy ; but in heaven all sorrow will be gone, and only joy remain.

7. That the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ :

Gold comes out the brighter when it is cleansed from all dross and is tested ; false metal would perish in the trial. Just so God is pleased to allow us to pass through lonely hours, bitter temptations, times of great sorrow, that He may bring us forth at last fit for His kingdom. Let us not be impatient of the process whereby we are being purified, shaped, and perfected, even though it lasts long.

8. Whom having not seen, ye love ; in whom, though now ye see him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory :

Here is our best of friends, our true comfort and help. We have not seen His face, nor heard Him speak, but His exceeding goodness is known to us now. This affection keeps us from evil affections ; this gives us hope, and enables us to persevere. God has shewn us this best and dearest Person, our God and yet our Brother, Who has suffered so great things for us ; and we reverently embrace Him and desire to please Him.

9. Receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls.

Yes, now, in a manner. Of course it is but begun, and in faith, and imperfectly. The soul longs for the completion of its happiness, and yet even now on earth God has raised us up to new life, given us new hopes and joys. We have had some foretaste of everlasting joy. Still,

“ Our crown, our treasure is not here.”

10. Of which salvation the prophets have enquired and searched diligently, who prophesied of the grace that should come unto you :

The prophets were not like those preachers who carry holy teachings to others, without getting any good themselves. No, they earnestly sought to know God's meaning ; they looked forward with hope to Christ's coming, grieved for His Passion, triumphed in His victory. In their day they were God's witnesses for right and truth, as well as heralds of distant mysteries to come. If we would be like them, we must be always learning from God and obeying what we have learnt already.

11. Searching what, or what manner of time the Spirit of Christ which was in them did signify, when it testified beforehand the sufferings of Christ, and the glory that should follow.

Christ's suffering, Christ's glory, was the theme of saints, the key to Scripture, the object of devout faith, for so many ages beforehand. Now that it has taken place, we should be the more eager to understand it. Indeed, Christ's sufferings did not wholly end with Calvary, for He still suffers in His members. They share now His humble condition, and one day they too will reach the glory where He is. All Scripture is full of the lesson,

“ Per crucem ad lucem.”

12. Unto whom it was revealed, that not unto themselves, but

unto us they did minister the things, which are now reported unto you by them that have preached the gospel unto you with the Holy Ghost sent down from heaven ; which things the angels desire to look into.

Here are prophets, apostles, and angels all gathered together to adore the mysteries of our redemption. Prophets foretold them, apostles spread them abroad, angels look down on them with wonder. Is it not strange that men should think everything else more interesting, more worth studying, than God's Word ? All other sciences and tastes have those who love them with passionate interest, and shall we, who believe, be so indifferent, so dull, to the beauties of Divine grace ?

13. Wherefore gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ ;

If you would enjoy the consolations of heaven, be sparing and sober in those of earth. Prepare for your journey, get rid of what hinders you, raise your eyes towards heaven, and remember that your treasure is there. How many Christians are so entangled amidst this world's cares and pleasures that they scarcely ever lift their thoughts towards heaven !

14. As obedient children, not fashioning yourselves according to the former lusts in your ignorance :

Our Father bids His children obey Him, thank Him, imitate Him. We are adopted into God's family, and have the honour and prospects of such a sonship. What a downfall it would be for us to go back to those miserable ways of filth and strife which beggars and outcasts follow ! Heavenly food, Divine teachings, daily prayers, the name of believers, would be ill suited with vice.

15. But as he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation ; 16. because it is written, Be ye holy ; for I am holy.

Alas ! we speak of holiness, and we hear of it and commend it, but how few follow it with all their hearts ! Do not compare yourself with the poor pattern of ordinary men, but look up at God's saints, then at the Lord Jesus Himself, then, last of all, at the boundless majesty of God, and you will be ashamed of the poor show of holiness that you are apt to strut about in.

17. And if ye call on the Father, who without respect of persons judgeth according to every man's work, pass the time of your sojourning here in fear :

The law of love does not hinder a holy fear. Even those who delight most in the riches of God's grace cannot afford to lay aside a deep distrust of themselves and awe of His justice. O Lord, the more I know Thy goodness and the privileges of my condition, the more I desire to humble myself in my own frailty. I am but dust and ashes, and I have to stand before Thy judgment-seat. Have mercy on me in that day.

18. Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers;

Christ has set us free from bondage to this world's customs. We have a new Master, and a service which is perfect freedom. Some are enslaved to piling up wealth, others to finding amusement, others to all manner of superstitions and delusions; but our dear Lord has made us see the vanity of such lives, and has put us in the heavenward road. Great and lasting and mighty may be the world's errors, yet a ray of Divine truth shews us how to choose what is better.

19. But with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot:

Christ's Blood is precious; it has Divine power to wash out sins and set us free. If the blood of the Passover lamb could save Israelites from the destroying angel, much more the Blood of Christ can deliver us from sin and death. When we come to God's altar that Blood is there spiritually presented to us, and its power is applied afresh to wash out the stains of our souls.

20. Who verily was foreordained before the foundation of the world, but was manifest in these last times for you,

This great world was built by God. His wisdom variously devised and arranged it in its gradual development, its different orders of creatures. Who can express God's wisdom displayed in creation? Ay, but there was another world besides present to the Creator's mind,—that of grace. Here, too, are mysteries, and depths, a gradual unfolding, a spiritual perfection, a mighty purpose working widely and marvellously. If we admire God's glory in the world that He founded, we acknowledge He is no less wonderful in the salvation which He proclaimed through Christ.

21. Who by him do believe in God, that raised him up from the dead, and gave him glory; that your faith and hope might be in God.

Faith looks behind the visible heavens and sees Christ glorified; Hope already enjoys His promises, and finds them delightful; and

all this is because He rose from the dead. Easter Day has given us new thoughts and hopes. Even

"The base world, now Christ hath died,
Ennobled is, and glorified."

22. Seeing ye have purified your souls in obeying the truth through the Spirit unto unfeigned love of the brethren, see that ye love one another with a pure heart fervently:

True conversion has with it purity, obedience, and love. It would be only a false pretence if it lacked those marks of reality. Many are called Christians, many make a profession of service, but something deeper is required. What a great tie there is between all those who believe and obey God's Word ; however they differ in outward position, there is a tie which unites them in heart.

23. Being born again, not of corruptible seed, but of incorruptible, by the word of God, which liveth and abideth for ever.

Our heavenly Father has appointed a multitude of children for Himself, renewed them in His own Image, made them heirs of His glory. What a great dignity, for us to be joined to God's family ! we know not how this great privilege became ours, but it is our duty to live worthily of it. Plainly it is not for God's children to quarrel, to be covetous, to cherish evil desires. What would our Father think of us ?

24. For all flesh is as grass, and all the glory of man as the flower of grass. The grass withereth, and the flower thereof falleth away : 25. but the word of the Lord endureth for ever. And this is the word which by the gospel is preached unto you.

Our new birth is not a mere fancy, or the feeling of a moment, but a new life implanted in us by the power of God. Yes ; youth and strength pass, friends die, money wastes, but the soul that has begun the new life of grace has something on which to rest, though all around changes. Glory be to God for thus linking our frailty with His eternity.

CHAPTER II.

1. He dehorteth them from the breach of charity: 4. shewing that Christ is the foundation whereupon they are built. 11. He beseecheth them also to abstain from fleshly lusts, 13. to be obedient to magistrates, 18. and teacheth servants how to obey their masters, 20. patiently suffering for well doing, after the example of Christ.

WHEREFORE laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, 2. as newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby:

In one sense the best Christians are children still; not in years, nor in apprehension, but yet children in having no malice, no pretence, no remembrance of evil. Children, too, in looking forward, not backward; they trust to attain a full stature in their Father's home. Children, too, in growing day by day through the heavenly food which they receive from God. These marks of God's children they keep, though they grow old in the world's reckoning.

3. If so be ye have tasted that the Lord is gracious.

All earthly enjoyments have their season, and then become tedious or distasteful, but the mercy of God is always sweet to the taste of Christians; they find in the Psalms, in Christ's Passion, in the promises of forgiveness or of heavenly joy, a comfort which is always in season. Only, dear friends, we must taste this for ourselves; it is no good merely hearing of it, or seeing others partake; nourishment cannot take place like that.

4. To whom coming, as unto a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, and precious,

Christ the Lord is our Foundation; souls are drawn to Him by His grace, they are knit to Him and share in His worthiness. While on earth He was made of little account by the world, but yet in God's reckoning was infinitely precious. So it is with the other stones of the heavenly building; they may be despised and rejected here below, but are dear to God. This was the order for the heavenly foundation-stone: He was first shaped by suffering, cast out, and despised; afterwards came His glory.

5. Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Christ the Lord is our priest, yet we also bring our sacrifice, in remembrance of, and in union with, that great Offering which He made once for us. What a great dignity it is for us to share in Christ's Sacrifice and offer up ourselves, our souls and bodies, our prayers and earnest desires, to God through Christ ! Do not fear, though your offering be poor and mean, and yourself unworthy, for Christ Jesus will present it.

6. Wherefore also it is contained in the scripture, Behold, I lay in Sion a chief corner stone, elect, precious : and he that believeth on him shall not be confounded.

This sure foundation is laid for us that our souls may be established on it. All else may crack and change, but this will not give way ; only we must be joined to this foundation by a living faith. May such a faith be ours, that knows Christ's mercy, and strives against sin, and longs to love Him better. May the apprehension that we have of Him now grow into a full and perfect union.

7. Unto you therefore which believe he is precious : but unto them which be disobedient, the stone which the builders disallowed, the same is made the head of the corner,

Why is Christ the Lord so precious to believers ? Because of His great excellences, because He suffered such things for us, because we daily experience His love, learn of His wisdom, depend on His bounty. Indeed, the more He is despised by the world, the more loyally we will cling to Him. The heart must have something to love ; to be free from the base love of the world and the flesh we must have found a better and truer affection.

8. And a stone of stumbling, and a rock of offence, even to them which stumble at the word, being disobedient : whereunto also they were appointed.

Christ's enemies are often mighty and wise. They think that they have put Him down for ever ; they have infinite contempt for Him and His friends ; they find only occasions of scandal in His words and acts. It is not of ourselves but of God's mercy that we are not in that host. What has opened our eyes ? what has softened our hearts ? Nothing, O Lord, but Thy undeserved mercy.

9. But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, an holy nation, a peculiar people ; that ye should shew forth the praises of him who hath called you out of darkness into his marvellous light : 10. which in time past were not a people, but are now the people of God : which had not obtained mercy, but now have obtained mercy.

What glorious titles, what a wealth of mercy! “Lord, what is man that Thou art mindful of him, or the son of man that Thou visitest him?” Here is a much greater dignity than creation conferred on us. We are chosen out of the world, consecrated to offer gifts to the King of heaven, become a nation or people with our own language, laws, and honours. Our duty is to praise and glorify our God for His mercy. Yet let us be watchful still, for

“ All these hopes, and all their fair array,
One tender bosom sin blows quite away.”

11. Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul;

If we are in a strange land, journeying towards our true home, we must not cling very closely to what we find round us here. Our first duty is to find out the path and make progress on it, just taking with us what food or money is needful, but not looking to establish ourselves here. Sinful lusts are robbers which seek to catch us on the highway, stop our journey, and seize our goods and life. We must not heed their persuasions, but pass on at once, looking up towards our home.

12. Having your conversation honest among the Gentiles: that, whereas they speak against you as evildoers, they may by your good works, which they shall behold, glorify God in the day of visitation.

O happy day of visitation, when God converts those who were hardened before! He visits the sinner’s heart by His grace, gives him light, makes him see the happy estate of Christians, and the glory and satisfaction of serving God. Sinners cannot accomplish this work for themselves; it is wrought only by God’s grace, in answer to faithful prayers.

13. Submit yourselves to every ordinance of man for the Lord’s sake: whether it be to the king, as supreme; 14. or unto governors, as unto them that are sent by him for the punishment of evildoers, and for the praise of them that do well.

It is not the question here whence civil power arose, nor how it grew, nor what form of government is best, nor when it may be changed. All these subtleties the apostle puts aside, and gives us a general rule of submission. Obedience, duty, nay, loyalty, are plainly right. God would have earth, like heaven, a place of blessed obedience and order. Civil society is ordained by God, and He appoints our places in it. Only let us strive to make it just and merciful in all its administration.

15. For so is the will of God, that with well doing ye may put to silence the ignorance of foolish men :

This is the best kind of argument. Every one cannot understand, or will not listen to, good reasons; but good example is an unanswerable reason, a persuasion which none can resist. If religion is reviled all around you, let your part be to recommend your faith by a sober, honest, charitable life, rather than by rash arguments. Men will listen to deeds more than to words.

16. As free, and not using your liberty for a cloke of maliceousness, but as the servants of God.

Freedom is our delight and pride. We are citizens of a free nation, and God has set us free again by His grace. Praise to His mercy that we are not born slaves or subjects of a tyrant; that we are not subject now to the yoke of the Jewish law, nor heathen superstition. Only remember that we belong to God. He is our Master, and our best happiness is to recognise this service. Those who try to be independent of Him are in danger of becoming miserable slaves again.

17. Honour all men. Love the brotherhood. Fear God. Honour the king.

Here are four short rules which the apostle gives : 1. Shew respect and consideration for all men according to their condition. All God's creatures are worth treating with respect and forbearance. 2. Shew love to Christians, as heirs of the same heaven, members of the same family, friends of the same Saviour with yourself. If you care for Him you will care for them. 3. Reverence God's majesty, with devotion, with submission to His Will, with trust in His Word. 4. Obey the king as set in God's place, and representing Him in this world's concerns. God's mercy has given us those whom we should reverence, yet for His sake, and putting Him first of all.

18. Servants, be subject to your masters with all fear ; not only to the good and gentle, but also to the froward.

Scripture, which is meant for the many, rather than the few, never forgets those who are in places of subjection. In households and shops and farms, and all the businesses of men, there are many to obey, few to rule. Here are some great lessons of patience, respect, and duty for those who happen to be placed under the orders of some one who is hard to please. Dear friend, if you have to obey any one who is never satisfied, never grateful, nay, who is spiteful, unkind, exacting, then the Lord meant all this passage that follows, to the end of this chapter, specially for you.

19. For this is thankworthy, if a man for conscience toward God endure grief, suffering wrongfully.

Then there could be found in slaves the knowledge and love of God, gifts of faith, patience, uprightness. God's grace was richly poured out on persons of mean condition. God observed their patience, and would reward it. Glory be to His mercy that keeps account of our prayers and tears. He is a liberal and just Master, whatever the world's masters be.

20. For what glory is it, if, when ye be buffeted for your faults, ye shall take it patiently ? but if, when ye do well, and suffer for it, ye take it patiently, this is acceptable with God.

True, there is a blessing also in patience when we are suffering deserved punishment,—that Christ also blessed in the example of the thief on the cross ; but it is little in comparison to the rich blessing that awaits those who suffer unjustly, and offer their tears to God in union with Christ's own Cross. Generally we are full of indignation if we are unfairly used, and yet this is one of God's special favours. He bestows it on His dearest friends. He means it for their exceeding honour.

21. For even hereunto were ye called : because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that ye should follow his steps :

Here S. Peter sets up the Cross right in front of us. In the old time He had besought the Lord to avoid suffering, deemed it altogether unworthy of Him (S. Matt. xvi. 22), but now he had learnt better. He remembered his Master's oft-repeated prediction of His Cross, he had seen Him in His Agony, and in the hall of Caiaphas. All these sacred memories of a suffering Lord were fresh in his mind.

*22. Who did no sin, neither was guile found in his mouth :
23. who, when he was reviled, reviled not again ; when he suffered, he threatened not ; but committed himself to him that judgeth righteously :*

He did uprightly, spoke truly, was full of mercy, and yet He had to suffer shame and the Cross. Our worthiness cannot be so great as His was, nor yet our sufferings ; let us at least try to imitate His patience ; that is more within our reach. Lord, keep us from irritable behaviour, help us to keep back angry replies, let us commit ourselves quietly into Thy hands. Thou art indeed the best of teachers ; may Thy lesson become ours at last ! Thy miracles are wholly out of my reach, Thy wisdom also, and Thy holiness ; but this one matter of Thy patience is left for me to embrace.

24. Who his own self bare our sins in his own body on the tree, that we, being dead to sins, should live unto righteousness : by whose stripes ye were healed.

Not only as a pattern, but as a sacrifice. The best of examples would not have profited us unless pardon and life and grace had come with it. Christ took the burden of our sins, the stripes we deserved, the death in body which we felt in soul ; and in exchange He gave us purity and healing and a new life. Indeed, we cannot see all the reasons why God's creation should be full of suffering, yet we see that once, on Christ's Cross, the suffering of the innocent has renewed the world, and thus we learn to await the full working out of God's designs.

25. For ye were as sheep going astray ; but are now returned unto the Shepherd and Bishop of your souls.

S. Peter remembered how the Good Shepherd had sought for him when he had himself gone astray. The life-giving look that brought contrition to his heart, the loving inquiry thrice repeated, the charge to feed His sheep, all that dealing of Christ with his own soul, made him understand how Divine mercy searches, saves, forbears, comforts, enlightens, directs our tottering steps along the road of this world, finally lands us safe in everlasting joy.

CHAPTER III.

1. *He teacheth the duty of wives and husbands to each other, 8. exhorting all men to unity and love, 14. and to suffer persecution. 19. He declareth also the benefits of Christ toward the old world.*

LIKEWISE, *ye wives, be in subjection to your own husbands ; that, if any obey not the word, they also may without the word be won by the conversation of the wives ;*

Here is a method of converting without preaching. There are no dangers attached to this kind of argument, no strife, no heat. Husbands who are ungodly or careless may be thus won to God, by seeing in the behaviour of a wife how pleasant, peaceful, unselfish and enduring is God's true service. If women desire to bring their husbands to God, let them observe how much it rests with them to recommend the gospel by its fruits in their own lives.

2. *While they behold your chaste conversation coupled with fear.*

Purity and reverence appear in a Christian woman's life. She puts

aside all manner of evil, she avoids carefully all occasions of disagreement. Think how miserable is the opposite character, when a woman is not ashamed, not afraid, when she talks of evil freely, boasts of her own independence. Such a one has laid aside all her true glory.

3. Whose adorning let it not be that outward adorning of plaiting the hair, and of wearing of gold, or of putting on of apparel;

In these days there is great need of women setting the example of simplicity of life and adornment. When all classes run alike towards foolish waste and extravagance, how great good a wife may do by wisely regulating her expenses! Our bodies must soon turn to dust; meanwhile they are but instruments and helps to the soul. God's service, His poor, many occasions of useful expenditure, should come before our own vanity.

4. But let it be the hidden man of the heart, in that which is not corruptible, even the ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of God of great price.

Here is a charm which never tires, and which pleases both God and man. The apostle thought fine clothes and jewels were nothing in comparison with it. Thank God, many of us know in a mother, sister, or wife, this gentle and peaceful influence which has refreshed and comforted our days, and won us to love religion.

5. For after this manner in the old time the holy women also, who trusted in God, adorned themselves, being in subjection unto their own husbands: 6. even as Sara obeyed Abraham, calling him lord: whose daughters ye are, as long as ye do well, and are not afraid with any amazement.

The history of God's people in Old Testament days furnishes us with many pictures of domestic love and peace. The Church of God grew out of Abraham's family and the lessons learnt there. Christian times furnish us with many more examples, such as the holy family at Nazareth, and the mutual relations between our Saviour and His holy Mother. Let us in our day not disgrace the Church of God to which we belong. Saints and angels expect us to behave as their brethren.

7. Likewise, ye husbands, dwell with them according to knowledge, giving honour unto the wife, as unto the weaker vessel, and as being heirs together of the grace of life; that your prayers be not hindered.

What a good rule, that husband and wife should always remember

that they are both heirs of heaven in the future, and that they both must pray together now ! Our union is not for a time, but for eternity, if we both are faithful to God ; and we should pray together every night, and so melt away the roughnesses and imperfections which have crept in during the day. Our prayers are spoilt by ill-temper, by sloth, by self-indulgence ; but being poor, sick, or anxious, will only make them more earnest.

8. Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous :

Christian behaviour is summed up in this verse. We should have one aim and purpose which binds us together. We should feel tenderly our brethren's sorrows and joys ; love them as children of the same heavenly Father ; shew them help and comfort in their afflictions ; be unassuming and considerate in our ways towards them. Every one desires to have to do with such characters as are here described. Oh that we could ourselves prize these excellences and shew them forth !

9. Not rendering evil for evil, or railing for railing : but contrariwise blessing ; knowing that ye are thereunto called, that ye should inherit a blessing.

How hard I find it to reply gently to a sharp word ! How easily unkindness in other men disposes me to be sharp and bitter towards them ! This is the test of my religion being true or false. If I am not ready to pardon unkind words, how can I hope for a share in Christ's pardon won for me ? Let me remember that a little patience here below will win for me an infinite blessing hereafter.

10. For he that will love life, and see good days, let him refrain his tongue from evil, and his lips that they speak no guile : 11. let him eschew evil, and do good ; let him seek peace, and ensue it. 12. For the eyes of the Lord are over the righteous, and his ears are open unto their prayers : but the face of the Lord is against them that do evil.

In these three verses are three requisites for a happy life—speaking well, doing well, praying well. Lord, plant in my heart a love of my eternal happiness, that in view of it I may order my talk, my deeds, my prayers, so that they may be acceptable to Thee, for Christ's sake. The heavenly country will receive such characters and such only as are here described. May I strive daily to become fitter for it.

13. And who is he that will harm you, if ye be followers of that which is good ?

Sin is the worst enemy. Purity and uprightness are a sovereign remedy against the evils of life. He who is at peace with God need not fear men. This is what we tell our young friends when they start in the world : Only follow Christ and choose the right, and you will have an inward peace and strength which neither illness nor loss nor violence can take away from you. Whatever the troubled course of this life has in store for you, only follow what is good, and you will reap good.

14. But and if ye suffer for righteousness' sake, happy are ye : and be not afraid of their terror, neither be troubled ;

Nay, it is a double mercy ; it is one gift to love righteousness, and a second, still choicer, to have to suffer for it. The Lord reserves that for His chosen friends. His love is able to overcome pain and fear, and establish peace within, even when all around looks dark.

15. But sanctify the Lord God in your hearts : and be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear :

Care most of all for this, that your own heart be a fit temple for Christ to dwell in, and then He will help you to reply with fitting words when you are questioned as to your faith. All cannot speak eloquently, but all can give some reasons for loving our Divine Master. If He is so good, so gracious, so true, if His service and promises are so delightful, can we not say so ? The gospel is the fulfilment of man's longings, the key to what is hard, a ray of light thrown into the world's darkness. We who believe this must not be ashamed to utter what we believe.

16. Having a good conscience ; that, whereas they speak evil of you, as of evildoers, they may be ashamed that falsely accuse your good conversation in Christ.

People said all manner of dreadful things against Christians then ; why should it be so strange if we have evil reports made about us ? A good conscience is our refuge ; let us strive to keep that conscience pure by humble confession of sin, by watchfulness, by frequent prayer. Alas ! both conscience and life need much allowance, much cleansing from above.

17. For it is better, if the will of God be so, that ye suffer for well doing, than for evil doing.

It is a favour of God to have to suffer for our sins, as did the penitent thief, and to bear it patiently ; it is a still greater favour to suffer for righteousness' sake, as the martyrs did. This kind of suffering

is more after Christ's own pattern ; it is not only our merciful Father's Will for us His children, but a

" Faint shadow of the spear-pierced Side,
And thorn-encompassed Head."

18. For Christ also hath once suffered for sins, the just for the unjust, that he might bring us to God, being put to death in the flesh, but quickened by the Spirit :

Christ alone suffered to atone for the sins of others ; this neither martyrs nor penitents could do. His Death is our life. He on the Cross wrought out my redemption, brought me life and peace, opened heaven's door to me. His glorious rising again figures the new life of the soul which He has awakened within me. O unhappy I, if I were to reject the offering, shut the door, choose death again rather than life !

19. By which also he went and preached unto the spirits in prison ;

This verse reveals to us something of Christ's redeeming work in the unseen world. Many souls there waited for Him. After Thy Divine mercy, O Lord, had offered the prevailing sacrifice of the Cross, Thou didst impart its virtue even to the departed who on earth had never known it.

" They saw Thy day and heard Thy voice,
And in Thy glory did rejoice,
And Thou didst break their prison bars,
And lead them high above the stars."

20. Which sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein few, that is, eight souls were saved by water.

In that old time Noah gave warning, the ark was preparing, God's patience waited, and then at last the judgment came past recall. Yet the souls that died then had the offer of salvation made to them in the other world ; a greater preacher than Noah came to them there, and spoke of greater mercies and judgments than Noah knew of. If the words mean this, I must not mi-use them by putting off repentance to my own harm. I have heard of Christ, I know of the ark, salvation has been offered to me here, I dare not put off repentance in the hope of having another chance. Now is the time to believe and pray and accept Divine mercy ; all else is obscure.

21. The like figure whereunto even baptism doth also now save us (not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the

answering of a good conscience toward God,) by the resurrection of Jesus Christ :

As the water of the Flood bore up the family of believers high above the perishing world, so the water of Holy Baptism admits us into the Church, which has the promises, wherein our sins are remitted, where we are journeying towards heaven. Consider in Holy Baptism not merely the outward pouring of water, but the profession of repentance and faith, and the Death and Resurrection of Christ there shewn forth. There I became God's child, there I promised to remain His, there I received grace. Let not such mercies be in vain for me.

22. Who is gone into heaven, and is on the right hand of God; angels and authorities and powers being made subject unto him.

Five saving mysteries of Christ are recalled to us in Holy Baptism :
 1. His Death, wherein He bore the penalty of our sins and shed out water and blood from His Side. 2. His Resurrection, wherein He came forth glorious from the grave, and began a new and heavenly life. 3. His Ascension, which opened heaven to us, and took our heart and treasure there. 4. His sitting at the Father's right hand, to be an Intercessor, Friend, and High Priest, Who feels for us, to Whom we may commit our cares. 5. His sovereign power over all creatures, which is the ground of our hope, bids us believe that all things work for our good, and is our strong stay in life and death.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He exhorteth them to cease from sin by the example of Christ, and the consideration of the general end that now approacheth: 2d. and comforteth them against persecution.

FORASMUCH then as Christ hath suffered for us in the flesh, arm yourselves likewise with the same mind: for he that hath suffered in the flesh hath ceased from sin;

Would that our hearts were armed with this thought, that Christ has suffered for us on the shameful Cross. Then we should be strong to resist evil desires and all other temptations. Let us often remind ourselves of our dear Lord's Death. It was sin that caused it; He suffered for our transgressions, and to give us strength to fight against evil. When enemies assail us, let us shelter ourselves behind Christ's sacred Passion; there we shall be safe.

2. That he no longer should live the rest of his time in the flesh to the lusts of men, but to the will of God.

This is what is meant by dying to sin. It is to live a true life, not according to sinful passions, but according to God's holy Will. God is our Master ; we must obey Him and follow where His Spirit leads. Those are not true Christians who live to please themselves.

3. For the time past of our life may suffice us to have wrought the will of the Gentiles, when we walked in lasciviousness, lusts, excess of wine, revellings, banquetings, and abominable idolatries :

What makes a heathen ? Why, uncleanness, drunkenness, a luxurious life, worship of creatures. There must then be a great many heathen nowadays among those who call themselves Christians. Those whose life and language are impure, who make idols of their own passions, who do not scruple to join in sinful ways, may indeed come to church, but they are heathen in heart and outside the gospel covenant till they repent.

4. Wherein they think it strange that ye run not with them to the same excess of riot, speaking evil of you :

How many converts have had to bear this ! Yet, if God's mercy has called us to lead a new life, we may let the world mock or revile or despise us, we know what we have gained by the change. If Jesus Christ and His saints were subjects of contempt in their day, ought we to marvel at like treatment ? When we have conquered Satan the world's jeers will do us no harm.

5. Who shall give account to him that is ready to judge the quick and the dead.

That is the judgment to be feared ; man's judgment is of much less account. Neither living nor dead shall be able to avoid the summons of that great day. Indeed, it seems to delay long, but in God's reckoning a thousand years are as nothing. He knows when the time for judgment has come. We can commit our cause to Him.

6. For for this cause was the gospel preached also to them that are dead, that they might be judged according to men in the flesh, but live according to God in the spirit.

Here we have another brief glimpse into the unseen world. Life still goes on there ; nay, the gospel has been manifested there to those who knew it not while on earth. Even in these days many never hear it while they are alive, yet I am sure God's justice and

mercy have not left them out. He knows how to bring good out of what they suffered here, nay, how to turn death itself into a path of life for them. His all-embracing mercy is far wider than my narrow gaze can reach.

7. But the end of all things is at hand : be ye therefore sober, and watch unto prayer.

The end is nigh. This is a comfortable thought for one who has given up the world and made God his hope. This is a sad and terrifying thought for one who has set his whole heart on things below. We live in a transitory world, yet prayer, and patience, and good works have a lastingness about them which endures many shocks. Notice how the world's great fortunes, reputations, undertakings, all end soon. They dazzle men's eyes for a while, and then are gone.

8. And above all things have fervent charity among yourselves : for charity shall cover the multitude of sins.

Charity covers many sins, refuses to look at them, will not let them be mentioned. O sweet and forbearing temper, which God will reward with mercy in the day when all men shall need it ! Divine charity is able to hide all our sins with the mantle of Christ's holiness, yet bids us be ready to forgive others. Christ Himself says, "Forgive, and ye shall be forgiven."

9. Use hospitality one to another without grudging. 10. As every man hath received the gift, even so minister the same one to another, as good stewards of the manifold grace of God.

God has put into my hands many gifts for my brethren's use. I have means to share with them, some knowledge, some gift of teaching or helping. He Who is all fulness of blessing has committed to my weak hands some blessings to impart to those who need them. Only let me not be stingy or slothful in carrying out His gracious orders.

11. If any man speak, let him speak as the oracles of God ; if any man minister, let him do it as of the ability which God giveth : that God in all things may be glorified through Jesus Christ, to whom be praise and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

Do not suffer yourself to be led into a feeling of vainglory. Let your honour be in Christ alone, His mercy, His Passion, His glorious excellences. Acknowledge Him to be the Giver of all good, the Author of every good work done by your means. Never expect anything as due to your own merits, but confess honestly

that all your efforts would be vain, but for the exceeding mercy and ready help of our Divine Master.

12. Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you :

This passage has given courage to many martyrs. Now they are crowned with glory, now they look back upon all their sufferings ; but they once were flesh and blood ; they felt blows and insults, prison darkness, the prospect of a violent and shameful death ; they had moments of despondency. How suitably then does the holy apostle meet their case. He had himself known what suffering was, he had his own cross always in view ; it was no new thing to him that men should have to bear pain and shame for their faith.

13. But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings ; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy.

Here are two strong reasons for the sufferer to take courage : (1) Christ Himself suffered thus. S. Peter remembered the scene in the high priest's hall ; he had himself seen the Most Holy One outraged, mocked, and condemned by His creatures. All such sufferings are joined to, and sanctified by, the Sacred Passion of Christ Himself. And (2) a great recompence is promised. Christ glorified will give glory to His faithful servants. As He overcame, so will those who suffer for His sake. The cross lasts for a little while, then comes everlasting joy.

14. If ye be reproached for the name of Christ, happy are ye ; for the spirit of glory and of God resteth upon you : on their part he is evil spoken of, but on your part he is glorified.

Suffering may bring back to us that gracious Spirit whom we did not feel near in prosperous days. Blessing and comfort and inward peace have been with those whom the world hated as outcasts ; their inward joy far outbalanced their outward shame. Remember that being reviled for Christ's Name means being scorned either for the faith or for the behaviour becoming Christians. In these days it is no disgrace to be called a Christian ; but those who worship, who pray, who speak, who behave as Christians should, must make up their minds to be despised.

15. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, or as a thief, or as an evildoer, or as a busybody in other men's matters.

No, this is not the suffering of saints or martyrs ; yet our punishment

for crimes may be turned by God's mercy into the seed of endless joy. How many have been led to repentance by the sufferings which they brought on themselves ! The penitent thief who suffered on the cross beside Jesus Christ Himself found that was the road to paradise. Impunity is the worst of all consequences to our sins. If they do not find us out now, they will hereafter.

16. Yet if any man suffer as a Christian, let him not be ashamed ; but let him glorify God on this behalf.

This is to suffer as a Christian ; to bear insult, pain, or distress for being on Christ's side. His Church, His faith, His Sacraments, have to bear the world's scorn, and those who hold with Him must expect to be treated in the same way. It seems monstrous to us that such should be the case, while ungodly men ride triumphant ; and yet such sufferings are the chosen jewels, the star, the collar of state and diadem of honour which the Lord reserves for those whom He loves best.

17. For the time is come that judgment must begin at the house of God : and if it first begin at us, what shall the end be of them that obey not the gospel of God ?

God's mercy is chastising us. He removes what is amiss by the rod of His judgments. It is not because He cares not for you that He sends you severe affliction. On the contrary, it is because He desires your heart ; He would purify you from all evil and make you fit to serve in His Presence. Better this affliction than a careless, easy, undisciplined life.

18. And if the righteous scarcely be saved, where shall the ungodly and the sinner appear ?

Oh that this grave verse were rooted in our hearts ! If it is a hard thing to be religious, if suffering and shame fall on God's true servants, if their transgressions are visited on them, then we indifferent Christians are indeed amidst dangers, we have fierce enemies near, we court our ruin if we live carelessly. The heavenward road is indeed so steep and difficult that it needs all our strength to keep to it.

19. Wherefore let them that suffer according to the will of God commit the keeping of their souls to him in well doing, as unto a faithful Creator.

So he himself slept peacefully on the eve of death (Acts xii. 6). He knew that Divine mercy had not forsaken him in that hour. Whatever becomes of the body, yet the souls of the righteous are in God's Hand. No ill-usage of men can steal them from their

heavenly Father. They leave the world in peace, forgiving enemies, full of hope. May such an end be mine after all the sorrows of this troublesome world are past.

CHAPTER V.

1. *He exhorteth the elders to feed their flocks, 5. the younger to obey, 8. and all to be sober, watchful, and constant in the faith: 9. to resist the cruel adversary the devil.*

THE *elders which are among you I exhort, who am also an elder, and a witness of the sufferings of Christ, and also a partaker of the glory that shall be revealed:*

Ministers in these days have not seen Christ's Sufferings with their eyes as S. Peter had, nor has the promise of being with Him in His glory been audibly made to them; yet they must, if they would exhort their brethren to any effect, know something of Christ's sufferings and glory. Those are the two storehouses whence we may draw comfort and encouragement for our brethren. We awake men's hearts by pleading with them the bitter Passion of Christ, and relating His rich promises.

2. *Feed the flock of God which is among you, taking the oversight thereof, not by constraint, but willingly; not for filthy lucre, but of a ready mind;*

Feed them. How? By frequent instruction in God's Word, by administration of the Sacraments, by watchful care over their souls, by a good example in all things, by prayer to God for them, —such are the duties of a shepherd of souls. What an honour for frail mortals to have a portion of Christ's own work intrusted to us! Surely we cannot complain of the poverty of a benefice, or the dulness or ingratitude of parishioners, if we have considered rightly the mercy of our God in calling us to such a high office.

3. *Neither as being lords over God's heritage, but being examples to the flock.*

Those contradict this precept who assume a haughty manner and treat the poor with contempt, or who thunder forth severe denunciations without mercy, or who require a lofty standard of all, and make no allowance. The Lord Jesus Himself was most humble, forbearing, and merciful, and His saints have always been the same.

4. And when the chief Shepherd shall appear, ye shall receive a crown of glory that faileth not away.

O Chief Shepherd of souls! fit me, who am the meanest of Thy herdsmen, to perform my share of work. When I consider Thy words, Thy patience, Thy love, I see what my duties ought to be. I am astonished and greatly ashamed when I consider how far I have come short of this pattern, how poor my pains have been, how little of my care, my time, my thoughts, have been spent in this service.

5. Likewise, ye younger, submit yourselves unto the elder. Yea, all of you be subject one to another, and be clothed with humility: for God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble.

Consider your own nature ; you were mere nothing until God's goodness gave you being. He sustains you in it, nor could you draw breath for a moment apart from Him. Further, He alone has given you the new life of grace, has rescued you from iniquity, has withheld you from countless falls. It would be false and foolish to require honour from men, and wish them to treat you as if you were one much to be admired.

6. Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that he may exalt you in due time:

That is, we must submit our will to God's Will, our judgment to what He decides, our whole life to His adorable Providence, acknowledging that all the evil that is in us is our own, and all the good comes from Him, that our salvation is only of His mercy, and all that we have to suffer in this life is less than we deserve. We consent to humble ourselves before men for many reasons of prudence ; shall we not cheerfully humble ourselves under His Hand Who loves us and desires our eternal felicity ?

7. Casting all your care upon him ; for he careth for you.

Children do not fear lest father or mother should leave them to starve ; they trust in the love which has always been their stay. So should Christians feel about their heavenly Father. They serve Him with a quiet mind, doing their utmost, but relying always on His watchful love and care. In the saddest times His love makes itself most felt.

8. Be sober, be vigilant ; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour :

Soberness and watchfulness are our weapons against this deadly

enemy. Indeed he is strong and fierce and cunning, and tries to turn all things to our harm. We need to be on our guard every day ; and yet we know that Christ has overcome Satan, and by His grace many frail mortals have triumphed also. Lord, may I always bear in mind the nearness of my enemy, and my own extreme liability to fall. Without Thee I may be ruined in a moment.

9. *Whom resist steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same afflictions are accomplished in your brethren that are in the world.*

Sufferers may remember that they are members of a great brotherhood which extends throughout the world. This is the Society of the Cross of Christ ; it consists of those who are afflicted, yet hope and pray. In how many corners of the earth tears and cries go up to God, souls are tried by suffering, Jesus is glorified in their patience ! When it pleases God to join us in our turn to this holy fellowship we must not shrink away nor complain. When the fight comes round to our position we must stand firm and do our best.

10. *But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you.*

Dear friends, far from being confounded at affliction, observe the gracious love and care with which God makes all things serve to your salvation. God desires that you should enjoy heaven with Him, and He sends you suffering in order to fit you for that blessed condition. He would have you walk after the pattern of Christ and His saints, who themselves suffered. He will soon remove all that is so bitter now, and bring in everlasting joy. All this is sober fact and truth.

11. *To him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.*

The apostle reminds us how large a portion of our worship should consist in praise. In proportion as we know more of God's goodness we shall have more reason to glorify Him. Heaven will be always full of praise. His strength is the more shewn through our very weakness and sufferings.

12. *By Silvanus, a faithful brother unto you, as I suppose, I have written briefly, exhorting, and testifying that this is the true grace of God wherein ye stand.*

This is God's true grace, which we enjoy in the gospel ; true, as representing worthily His love and holiness ; true, in spite of all that men can say against it ; true, in spite of the trials and suffer-

ings which come on believers. Divine mercy has imparted it to us and helped us so far to stand fast in it. May we do so to our life's end.

13. *The church that is at Babylon, elected together with you, saluteth you ; and so doth Marcus my son.*

Even in the great city there were faithful souls who thought of their suffering fellow-Christians. Babylon seems here to mean Rome as representing the power of this world in the way that the real Babylon did to the Jews of Isaiah's day. S. Peter was martyred there. S. Mark wrote his gospel there. Amidst the enormous luxury and crime of the imperial city there grew up a body of Christians, tried by many sufferings, preparing for the day when freedom to worship God should be granted to all. How they waited and prayed for that day ! yet when it came at last new dangers to the Church came with it.

14. *Greet ye one another with a kiss of charity. Peace be with you all that are in Christ Jesus. Amen.*

The apostle who had to feed Christ's flock, who had known His love and pity by so many proofs, was full of sympathy for all. He wrote this letter to express his love for those who were suffering. No doubt he still prays for us ; he desires us to live in peace and charity ; he would have us bear up against trials. We, too, are of the number of those sheep whom he was bidden to cherish. All who are Christ's are S. Peter's also.

*THE SECOND EPISTLE GENERAL
OF PETER.*

CHAPTER I.

1. Confirming them in hope of the increase of God's graces, 5. he exhorteth them, by faith, and good works, to make their calling sure: 12. whereof he is careful to remember them, knowing that his death is at hand: 16. and warneth them to be constant in the faith of Christ, who is the true Son of God, by the eye-witness of the apostles beholding his majesty, and by the testimony of the Father, and the prophets.

SIMON PETER, a servant and an apostle of Jesus Christ, to them that have obtained like precious faith with us through the righteousness of God and our Saviour Jesus Christ:

Faith is the same in those who were eye-witnesses of Christ's work and in us who now read of it. We have the same precious faith which sustained and comforted the saints of old. God's goodness and Christ's merits have provided it for us.

2. Grace and peace be multiplied unto you through the knowledge of God, and of Jesus our Lord,

Some kinds of knowledge dry up the heart, or minister to vainglory, but the knowledge of God and of the Lord Jesus our Saviour brings grace and peace to us. This is the most important kind of learning, and the simple may make progress in it beyond great scholars.

3. According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Glory be to God for His gifts. He has shewn us this world's knowledge, and, better still, the treasures of His saving truth. All

His power and love have been employed for our redemption. He looked on our frail, fallen nature, and stretched out His merciful hand to us.

4. Whereby are given unto us exceeding great and precious promises: that by these ye might be partakers of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust.

Glory be to God for His promises. He has promised to free us from the dominion of evil, and make us again like Himself. This great hope should encourage us to live a godly, righteous, and sober life here, as befitting those who look forward to Christ's appearing.

5. And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; 6. and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; 7. and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity.

Faith is described here as having seven fruits. As it grows, it bears these graces. It is always striving towards perfection. True Christians never stand still; they are always desiring to do better. They feel their inward poverty, and so desire earnestly fresh supplies of Divine grace. How much I, who read these words, need to advance in the Divine life!

8. For if these things be in you, and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ. 9. But he that lacketh these things is blind, and cannot see afar off, and hath forgotten that he was purged from his old sins.

What a condemnation of a merely nominal Christian! He is idle, unfruitful, blind, and forgetful. He rests on his outward profession, and remains cold and heedless amidst God's daily calls, warnings, mercies. He has forgotten utterly those sweet moments in which God once spoke to his heart and told him of forgiveness.

10. Wherefore the rather, brethren, give diligence to make your calling and election sure: for if ye do these things, ye shall never fall:

God has called me and chosen me; His promises are sure, His love cannot fail. Yes, but I must also obey His Word and keep my part of the covenant. My best security is to walk humbly, and give up my whole life to obedience. I dare not pry into the mysteries which surround His eternal decrees, but all I know is that I have great need to watch and pray.

11. For so an entrance shall be ministered unto you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

Let me enter further and further into the meaning of Scripture and the graces of a Christian life here below, so that I may one day enter in at the heavenly gate, and remain within for ever. That eternal reward will be the crown of those who labour ; it is not for the slothful.

12. Wherefore I will not be negligent to put you always in remembrance of these things, though ye know them, and be established in the present truth. 13. Yea, I think it meet, as long as I am in this tabernacle, to stir you up by putting you in remembrance ;

This body is but a tabernacle or tent in which the traveller sleeps for a night, or the soldier rests before the battle. Soon it must be taken down and laid aside, to be one day renewed and made into a lasting dwelling-place.

14. Knowing that shortly I must put off this my tabernacle, even as our Lord Jesus Christ hath shewed me.

We do not need a special revelation to assure us that we must soon die. Indeed, God does not shew us the time or manner of our end, but we know that it is near. This is a wholesome thing to reflect on, and makes us diligent to carry good works through, and leave something well done behind us.

15. Moreover I will endeavour that ye may be able after my decease to have these things always in remembrance.

The apostle's words would remain when he himself had departed. He knew how great need we had to be confirmed in our religion by good advice and exhortations. In this way the saints are still present with us on earth ; their words and example lead us onward. No doubt they also pray for us where they are now.

16. For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

No, the gospel is not a dream or fable, but the testimony of eyewitnesses. We declare unto you what God has been pleased to do and reveal ; how, in the Person of His dear Son, He shewed Himself on earth and conversed with men. We appeal to your own hearts for a welcome to this truth, but it comes from without, it is a part of history, it is the account of what happened once for all before angels and men.

17. *For he received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to him from the excellent glory, This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.* 18. *And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with him in the holy mount.*

Christians love to read of that occasion in their Lord's life, when the

"Rays of glory forced their way
Through the garment of decay,
With which, as with a cloak, He had
His Divinest splendour clad."

19. *We have also a more sure word of prophecy ; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day star arise in your hearts :*

Here is more evidence of the gospel. Consider the Old Testament, its shadows, its longings, its imperfections ; how the advent of a great and holy One to suffer and triumph, to bring in a spiritual law and a Catholic faith, lay at the root of all. Further still, look what light, comfort, joy, Christian religion gives ; it is its own best evidence. To possess it is a new life ; those who have made trial of it have found it true.

20. *Knowing this first, that no prophecy of the scripture is of any private interpretation.* 21. *For the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man : but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost.*

The ancient prophecies are not mere guesses or dreams, but One mightier than man guided the prophet's heart and tongue to shadow forth things to come. It would be a mistake for us to forget how God dwelt in the Jewish Church, and gradually enlightened it with fuller truth and clearer hope. I see now gratefully how types and visions and predictions all guide me towards my Saviour.

CHAPTER II.

1. **H**e foretelleth them of false teachers, shewing the impiety and punishment both of them and their followers: 7. from which the godly shall be delivered, as Lot was out of Sodom: 10. and more fully describeth the manners of those profane and blasphemous seducers, whereby they may be the better known, and avoided.

BUT there were false prophets also among the people, even as there shall be false teachers among you, who privily shall bring in damnable heresies, even denying the Lord that bought them, and bring upon themselves swift destruction.

So we see that those who have known Christ's truth, been instructed in Holy Scripture, made God's children, may yet renounce all this, and take up with dangerous errors which bring them to ruin both of body and soul. God has foretold that such downfall should come.

2. *And many shall follow their pernicious ways; by reason of whom the way of truth shall be evil spoken of.*

This is the effect of heresy; Christians are tempted away from the Church, and heathens hindered from entering it. Do not be surprised to find many following after error, many reviling the gospel. Take care only to keep fast your own hold on the truth, even though you find few to countenance you. God's saints are on your side.

3. *And through covetousness shall they with feigned words make merchandise of you: whose judgment now of a long time lingereth not, and their damnation slumbereth not.*

God's sentence has been pronounced, His avengers are ready, His judgments about to descend. We must not let the apparent impunity of sin deceive us into unbelief, our eyes can discern so very small a part of God's ways.

4. *For if God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment;*

I have known those who were set high in God's Church, and were like angels from above, in our estimation, yet fall into deadly sin or betray the faith. Angelic purity and gifts could not prevent angels from falling, and shall we be amazed if our frail earthly angels are subject to temptation?

5. And spared not the old world, but saved Noah the eighth person, a preacher of righteousness, bringing in the flood upon the world of the ungodly;

Noah was singular in his day ; few shared his fears and hopes. Let us take courage when we seem alone amidst a scornful world. Profaneness and sin will bring misery at last, whether the offenders are few or many.

6. And turning the cities of Sodom and Gomorrha into ashes condemned them with an overthrow, making them an example unto those that after should live ungodly ;

If unclean passions do not always bring down fire from heaven, yet they harden the heart, destroy all tenderness, all true love, leave only vile dreams in the place of noble aims and hopes. Bewarned, and keep down such enemies, lest they destroy your soul.

7. And delivered just Lot, vexed with the filthy conversation of the wicked : 8. (for that righteous man dwelling among them, in seeing and hearing, vexed his righteous soul from day to day with their unlawful deeds ;)

God's grace kept Lot from joining in the sins that went on around him. He knows how to preserve His servants amidst temptation. True Christians have dared to stand up alone against the great torrent of evil customs, and declare that they would keep themselves pure.

9. The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly out of temptations, and to reserve the unjust unto the day of judgment to be punished :

God's Providence is mostly out of our sight, yet we can discern something of His ways. He does not fail those who trust in Him ; He does not overlook those who despise Him. He exercises the one by many troubles, yet in His love ; He bears with the others, nay, exalts and prospers them for a while, that their downfall may be more terrible at last.

10. But chiefly them that walk after the flesh in the lust of uncleanness, and despise government. Presumptuous are they, selfwilled, they are not afraid to speak evil of dignities. II. Whereas angels, which are greater in power and might, bring not railing accusation against them before the Lord.

In these days we need especially to remember this lesson of reverence. We should honour the aged, honour those who are over us in God's Church ; above all, we should honour our parents, or those who

are as parents to us. In God's worship we should behave with great reverence. Our speech should be the speech of those who know that God listens.

12. But these, as natural brute beasts, made to be taken and destroyed, speak evil of the things that they understand not ; and shall utterly perish in their own corruption :

I am akin to the brutes by my body, but to Thee, O God, by my soul. Let me never forget that I was made in Thy Image, created afresh by Thy grace, meant to live for ever in Thy kingdom. Thus I shall keep myself from those desires which would drag me down to the level of beasts.

13. And shall receive the reward of unrighteousness, as they that count it pleasure to riot in the day time. Spots they are and blemishes, sporting themselves with their own deceivings while they feast with you ; 14. having eyes full of adultery, and that cannot cease from sin ; beguiling unstable souls : an heart they have exercised with covetous practices ; cursed children :

All these evil consequences come from indulgence in the desires of the flesh. Mean and hateful passions occupy what was once a generous heart. That heart may seem to a careless observer lighted up with gaiety, but approach closer and you will find it occupied by death, and the home of evil spirits who revel there.

15. Which have forsaken the right way, and are gone astray, following the way of Balaam the son of Bosor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness ; 16. but was rebuked for his iniquity : the dumb ass speaking with man's voice forbad the madness of the prophet.

The character of Balaam tells us of knowledge without love.

" He hears the Almighty's word,
He sees the angel's sword,
Yet low upon the earth his heart and treasure lie."

17. These are wells without water, clouds that are carried with a tempest ; to whom the mist of darkness is reserved for ever.

Profitless lives, that made a great stir for an hour, had a great shew of wisdom, but left no refreshing dews behind.

18. For when they speak great swelling words of vanity, they allure through the lusts of the flesh, through much wantonness, those that were clean escaped from them who live in error.

19. While they promise them liberty, they themselves are the

servants of corruption : for of whom a man is overcome, of the same is he brought in bondage.

The bondage of habitual impurity is heavier than any other. Neither warnings, nor good examples, nor Divine grace itself, can turn such a heart. It is a terrible thing to say, but true, that the impure soul has changed into flesh ; it has no power any more to receive the Divine call. Break, O Lord, we pray Thee, this bondage, while there is yet a chance for the slave to get free.

20. *For if after they have escaped the pollutions of the world through the knowledge of the Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ, they are again entangled therein, and overcome, the latter end is worse with them than the beginning.*

Alas, how grievous is a backslider's condition ! All the freedom of grace, the light of true knowledge, the conscience at peace, the hope of heaven, are gone ; and the sinner bitterly ridicules, and yet envies, those who still walk in God's ways.

21. *For it had been better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than, after they have known it, to turn from the holy commandment delivered unto them.* 22. *But it is happened unto them according to the true proverb, The dog is turned to his own vomit again ; and the sow that was washed to her wallowing in the mire.*

These proverbs remind us of those Christians who go back to their old sins after conversion. God has washed us by His mercy, fed us with His holy Sacrament, set heaven before us ; and shall we throw all this away, and turn again to the foul pleasures of an evil life ? No ; let our steps be set stedfastly towards heaven ; soon we shall be beyond all danger of falling.

CHAPTER III.

1. He assureth them of the certainty of Christ's coming to judgment, against those scorners who dispute against it : 8. warning the godly, for the long patience of God, to hasten their repentance. 10. He describeth also the manner how the world shall be destroyed : 11. exhorting them, from the expectation thereof, to all holiness of life : 15. and again, to think the patience of God to tend to their salvation, as Paul wrote to them in his epistles.

THIS second epistle, beloved, I now write unto you ; in both which I stir up your pure minds by way of remembrance :

We are apt to grow careless and forgetful. Then God's mercy employs a sermon, a book, a friend, some visitation, to stir up our minds and make us think where we are.

2. That ye may be mindful of the words which were spoken before by the holy prophets, and of the commandment of us the apostles of the Lord and Saviour :

Both these sources of Divine instruction, what the prophets said under the old covenant, and what Christ the Lord and His apostles said under the new, are contained for us in Holy Scripture. Thank God, there are still some Christians who love and study their Bibles. Would that their number were increased.

3. Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, 4. and saying, Where is the promise of his coming ? for since the fathers fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation.

We have met these very persons, we have read their writings. They dwell upon the continuity of Nature, explain how she grows by a vast and gradual development, they trace the march of society upon a certain plan, and they ask us Christians how we can believe in an end of the world. They profess to see no sign in past or future of Divine Agency. Give us, Lord, when we hear such words, wisdom to reply aright, and grace to hold fast our faith.

5. For this they willingly are ignorant of, that by the word of God the heavens were of old, and the earth standing out of the water and in the water : 6. whereby the world that then was, being overflowed with water, perished :

Creation was a change, great and wonderful. God called into being the life of creatures which now goes on around and in us. Then there have been great breaches of the uniform order of the world, such as Noah's flood with its terrible effects. Such thoughts make us lean on God only, instead of resting vainly on the supposed unchangeableness of natural causes.

7. But the heavens and the earth, which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men.

One day another great catastrophe will come. God will bring to an end the world that we see, and, with this, will vindicate His justice that has been reproached by men. The moral order, that right must win and that evil brings misery, is the deepest of all laws ; that will never alter, though heaven and earth pass away.

8. But, beloved, be not ignorant of this one thing, that one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. 9. The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance.

Further, remember that God's plans are not subject to succession of time, as ours are. All things are equally present to His eyes. He guides the course of ages in His designs of mercy, to accomplish certain great ends for His creatures. At the close of life all our days will seem drawn to a span ; we shall feel alone with our God ; time will then be no more for us.

10. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.

All earth's beauties, all the splendid works of men, are but frail and mortal like men themselves ; one day will see an awful ending to them. What will stand in that day ? Only repentance and love and purity. No fire can hurt them.

11. Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness, 12. looking for and hastening unto the coming of the day of God, wherein the heavens being on fire shall be dissolved, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat?

If this world is transitory, we need to fix our hearts elsewhere. We must have found a refuge before that awful day comes.

"It is not for me to be seeking my bliss,
Or building my hopes in a region like this."

13. Nevertheless we, according to his promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness.

Here unrighteousness dwells, sorrow and death are at hand, all things decay ; but believers cherish their Master's promise of heaven. What a great difference it makes to have that hope deep in our hearts !

14. Wherefore, beloved, seeing that ye look for such things, be diligent that ye may be found of him in peace, without spot, and blameless.

We look for terrors and mercies to come ; we look in fear, yet in

hope. Such thoughts do not unsettle us from our earthly duties, but make us more diligent, peaceful, and upright. We occupy ourselves with this world, yet cast a glance forward towards eternity.

15. *And account that the longsuffering of our Lord is salvation; even as our beloved brother Paul also according to the wisdom given unto him hath written unto you;*

S. Paul had frequently spoken of Christ's coming to judgment, had warned men that it was not immediately at hand (2 Thess. ii. 2), had recommended them to prepare against that day. The thought of Christ's judgment coming, yet tarrying, is a frequent one in his epistles. Such passages are referred to here. We are told to recognise God's mercy in giving us further time for repentance.

16. *As also in all his epistles, speaking in them of these things; in which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other scriptures, unto their own destruction.*

Where he speaks of liberty, some wrest it to mean licence to sin. Where he speaks of God's eternal counsels, some use it to encourage recklessness. Where he speaks of being justified by faith, some interpret it as if we were justified by our feelings. Scripture, which is good, nay, precious, can yet be misused, like God's other gifts.

17. *Ye therefore, beloved, seeing ye know these things before, beware lest ye also, being led away with the error of the wicked, fall from your own stedfastness.* 18. *But grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. To him be glory both now and for ever. Amen.*

This is the way to persevere ; be always growing in grace and knowledge. If we cease to make progress we soon begin to fall back. Apostles have founded our holy faith, spiritual guides and books have instructed us, but God's grace alone can keep us stedfast and lead us safely into everlasting life. How many steps, how many dangers, how many slips and falls, alas ! we have to recount ; but yet we can praise and glorify our God for His mercy. May we do this hereafter in our Home.

THE FIRST EPISTLE GENERAL OF JOHN.

CHAPTER I.

1. **He describeth the person of Christ, in whom we have eternal life, by a communion with God: 5. to which we must adjoin holiness of life, to testify the truth of that our communion and profession of faith, as also to assure us of the forgiveness of our sins by Christ's death.**

THAT which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of life;

O wonderful mystery of God's wisdom, to lower Himself to our level, and so raise us up towards Him ! The unseen God has stepped forth from His glory, and subjected Himself to our ears, our eyes, our hands, in order to quicken our dull hearts with a spark of heavenly life.

2. *(For the life was manifested, and we have seen it, and bear witness, and shew unto you that eternal life, which was with the Father, and was manifested unto us;)*

True life, holy, perfect, triumphant life, life with no stain, life victorious over death, has been shewn to us in Christ Jesus. Apart from Him sin and death reign. O my Lord, may I gratefully receive from Thee a share in this precious gift of life ; may I experience it daily, treasure it safely, never lose it !

3. *That which we have seen and heard declare we unto you, that ye also may have fellowship with us: and truly our fellowship is with the Father, and with his Son Jesus Christ.*

The same privileges which the apostles had we can have also. The catholic faith knits us to them in one holy society, making us friends and disciples of Jesus, as they were. It knits us also to the unseen eternal God, bringing His Spirit to dwell within us ; and it

gives us a share in what Jesus wrought for our salvation. Alas, how unhappy are they who suffer unbelief or sin to rob them of all this!

4. And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full.

John wrote his testimony in order to strengthen and comfort us. He has passed away from earth long ago, but we can study what he has written about the Lord's glorious work, and love, and commandments. This world's joys may leave us, but we will cling fast to the joys which faith and hope bestow.

5. This then is the message which we have heard of him, and declare unto you, that God is light, and in him is no darkness at all.

In God is all perfection, truth, and holiness. All that is good streams forth from Him. All evil comes from losing Him. This was the substance of the message which the Lord taught His best beloved friend in a thousand ways.

6. If we say that we have fellowship with him, and walk in darkness, we lie, and do not the truth:

Many professing Christians walk in darkness. They shut out God from their hearts, live a selfish life, allow evil to reign within, and yet call themselves Christ's followers. Ah, what a vain title is this! Fellowship with God means to enjoy His favour, share in His love and purity. It implies that we have some kind of likeness to our heavenly Father.

7. But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleaneth us from all sin.

God's love set forth to us in Christ reveals to us our brotherhood with other men, and also opens a source of cleansing that can wash away all our transgressions. Christ helps us by His Life, His Death, His entry into heaven on our behalf. He takes away our vileness, gives us loving hearts, shews us how to walk. This sacred phrase, "the Blood of Jesus," has great depths and mysteries of mercy in it.

8. If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us.

Truth makes us aware of our own falsehoods. The sense of forgiven sin shews us what we were, what we still are, what we easily might become. Lord, grant us more and more love of

Thee, more and more fear of ourselves. What are we, to claim a repute for holiness !

9. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness. 10. If we say that we have not sinned, we make him a liar, and his word is not in us.

We need daily forgiveness, not only for grave and deadly sins, but for our many failures to live according to God's Will. Our thoughts, our words, our life, fall far short of the Divine purpose for us. God is faithful to His promise, all His mercy is pledged to us in Christ, but He requires in us a sincere acknowledgment that we need His mercy. When I come to die, may my last thought be an humble prayer to God for mercy.

CHAPTER II.

1. He comforteth them against the sins of infirmity. 3. Rightly to know God is to keep his commandments, 9. to love our brethren, 15. and not to love the world. 18. We must beware of seducers : 20. from whose deceits the godly are safe, preserved by perseverance in faith, and holiness of life.

MY little children, these things write I unto you, that ye sin not. And if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous :

Let sin cease in me ; but then I am so frail, so unworthy, I am often entangled in sin. Still I must not lose heart, for my Friend and Saviour undertakes my cause. This verse wonderfully unites encouragement for me in my efforts to do right with merciful consideration for my failures.

2. And he is the propitiation for our sins : and not for our's only, but also for the sins of the whole world.

O Divine Sacrifice, unlimited in time, unbounded in space ! Its virtue never grows old ; no one is outside its grace. All sacrifices of old time were but shadows and figures of Christ's one offering, which is for ever pleaded, for ever applied to us. Oh that I could waken sinners to hope for God's mercy again, by telling them of Christ's Death, and of God's love shewn forth there !

3. And hereby we do know that we know him, if we keep his commandments.

True experience of God comes from keeping His commandments. Let us obey, and we shall both understand and love better and better. Our God is Infinite, and high above us, yet if we cherish His commandments we shall come to understand His nature and goodness, and all His wise providence over our lives.

4. He that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him.

O my God, what a grave verse is this ! How it cuts at the root of all those losty professions and entrancing moments of religious excitement which so abound ! All this appearance of religion, without self-denial, truth, and patience, is but a false, deceiving show.

5. But whoso keepeth his word, in him verily is the love of God perfected : hereby know we that we are in him.

Obeying, loving, and knowing are in the end but one. If we give up ourselves to fulfil God's holy Will, we shall increase in all these three together. Remember, we need not look in high places, or among loud professors, for the true Christian. He may be found in rough ways, amidst many trials, with little outward show, and yet holding fast to God amidst all contradictions.

6. He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked.

Here is abiding and walking too, rest as well as movement ; here is our end and our way together. Christ's walk is one of uprightness, of love, of patience, a walk towards God, escaping the pitfalls of Satan. Divine wisdom bids us so to live that Christ the Lord may approve our life.

7. Brethren, I write no new commandment unto you, but an old commandment which ye had from the beginning. The old commandment is the word which ye have heard from the beginning.

The command to love is old, because it is written on man's heart, and was taught under the old covenant. Christ the Lord took it up afresh in His sermon on the mount, and revived the old characters which had been almost rubbed out. We too, as Christians, have often to return to the plain elements of faith and duty which we were taught long ago.

8. Again, a new commandment I write unto you, which thing is true in him and in you : because the darkness is past and the true light now shineth.

The command to love is new, because of Christ's holy life, which gives it a new force ; because of His gracious Passion, which shews us more of love than we ever understood before ; because of lives of saints, means of grace, daily calls and helps from above. We are Christians, and so bound to walk in newness of life. No deeds of unselfish love should be too high for us.

9. He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now. 10. He that loveth his brother abideth in the light, and there is none occasion of stumbling in him. 11. But he that hateth his brother is in darkness, and walketh in darkness, and knoweth not whither he goeth, because that darkness hath blinded his eyes.

Living in hatred is living in darkness. Then we do not see the good that there is in our brethren, nor our own danger, nor God's great mercies and grave warnings. Our hatred darkens our eyes. Lord, let Thy light shine inwardly upon us, and shew us our prejudices and grudges, that we may get rid of them.

12. I write unto you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for his name's sake. 13. I write unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I write unto you, young men, because ye have overcome the wicked one. I write unto you, little children, because ye have known the Father. 14. I have written unto you, fathers, because ye have known him that is from the beginning. I have written unto you, young men, because ye are strong, and the word of God abideth in you, and ye have overcome the wicked one.

Here are Christian children, who have received remission of sins in Holy Baptism, have been taken into God's family, and taught to find in Him a loving Father ever ready to care for them. Here are Christian old men, who have had a long experience of God's dealings ; they have found an unchanging friend in Him ; He has been their stay all through a long life. Here are Christian young men, who have fought against the flesh and the devil, and come off victorious by Divine grace. All these three classes of readers are members of God's family, called to seek bread for their souls at His Table, and to love and help each other.

15. Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him.

Then these two loves cannot go on together. We have to choose between the world and our heavenly Father. Remember that our hearts cannot live on mere prohibitions. Only by loving God

shall we be able to resist the extreme fascination which the world exercises. The world, apart from its Maker, is indeed wonderful and beautiful, full of mystery, full of delight for a while, but it offers no rest for the weary heart.

16. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father; but is of the world.

We see that the apostle, when he condemns the world, is not speaking of God's creation in itself, but of our misuse of it. It is we ourselves who turn God's creatures to evil, though He meant them for good. Our own sinful appetites, our covetousness, our pride, lead us away from the true God to set up idols in His place. Let me take warning when I read of these three sources of temptation, for I know their power.

17. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth for ever.

How can we, frail creatures of time, lay hold upon the unchanging? The answer is, "Acquaint thyself with God, and be at peace." There is our stay. One who prays, who loves God, who studies and obeys His Word, has anchored himself, and will not be carried off by the violent currents of life. All that is beautiful, grand, and precious on earth is most transitory, but if I cling to my God He will give me eternal promises.

18. Little children, it is the last time: and as ye have heard that antichrist shall come, even now are there many antichrists; whereby we know that it is the last time.

Antichrist meant some one who should oppose Christ, or take Christ's place. Christians had been taught to believe that there would rise up some one who, by his show of power and wisdom, by his persuasive words and supernatural acts, would strive to draw away believers from their Lord. All this was already beginning, and it continues still. Let us make ourselves well acquainted with the true Christ, His mercy, His purity, His humble and lowly walk, and then no Antichrist will be able to seduce us.

19. They went out from us, but they were not of us; for if they had been of us, they would no doubt have continued with us: but they went out, that they might be made manifest that they were not all of us.

There were some even in that day who had once renounced the world, once confessed Christ's Name, once mingled with His people, yet who had now become His enemies. O exceeding mercy of God, that has so far kept me from utterly falling away!

May I ever remain stedfast to my Lord. Apart from Him, what is there for me but misery?

20. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things.

The surest divination as to true Christ and false Christs lies in being taught by the Holy Spirit. A guileless heart that leans on God, and is daily taught by Him, will discern whom to trust. It is sufficient knowledge to know the holy catholic faith, and live by that. All our path becomes light then.

21. I have not written unto you because ye know not the truth, but because ye know it, and that no lie is of the truth.

We know God's truth, and yet are always learning it afresh. It is our cherished treasure, and yet our hope also. Lies cannot help forward God's kingdom; in proportion as we are sincere in thought, and word, and deed, will God teach us and lead us on to clearer light. What we know now is only a part of the great Divine plan, yet it is a part, and we are thankful for so much knowledge.

22. Who is a liar but he that denieth that Jesus is the Christ? He is antichrist, that denieth the Father and the Son.

Such errors abound still. Men deny Christ's Divine nature and mission; they rob Him of all His glorious attributes of power and mercy; they reduce the gospel to a dream. But, alas! we who profess the true faith are yet tempted to deny it in our lives. If we live in deadly sin, whatever be our profession of religion, we yet renounce our heavenly Father and our Divine Brother; we bring contempt upon them, and help to pull down truth.

23. Whosoever denieth the Son, the same hath not the Father: [but] he that acknowledgeth the Son hath the Father also.

Let us acknowledge God as our heavenly Father revealed to us in Christ Jesus. Let us acknowledge Christ Jesus as the Divine Son of God, and yet truly a man amongst men. This faith alone gives us true and sufficient thoughts about our God, and also a pattern by which we ourselves can rise towards Him.

24. Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning. If that which ye have heard from the beginning shall remain in you, ye also shall continue in the Son, and in the Father.

Heavenly truth abides in the believer's heart if he desires to keep it.

There it expands ; there it reveals ever more and more depths of love ; there it will abound in deeper proofs, will shew itself in holier graces, will bestow even here a foretaste of blessedness. How many simple hearts have been blessed with this abiding light, while proud natures put it from them !

25. And this is the promise that he hath promised us, even eternal life.

It is faith now ; one day it will be sight. It is love, purity, and truth all begun now, but one day it will be all these in perfection. It has glimpses of God's Presence now, but then He will be always seen. We know something, we have some enjoyment, some peace, some love here. Ah, these are but dim sparks from that full light and joy which this world cannot shew.

26. These things have I written unto you concerning them that seduce you. 27. But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you : but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him.

All our faith and duty are wrapped up in our baptismal profession. We have but to cling fast to that. If we do this God's Spirit will unfold the full meaning of His Word to us. Here is an inward teacher who speaks with more wisdom than earthly teachers know. Let us be always ready to learn of Him, and be thankful for the many lessons that He has shewn us already.

28. And now, little children, abide in him ; that, when he shall appear, we may have confidence, and not be ashamed before him at his coming.

It is far from John's thoughts to regard the Lord's appearing as an arrival from a distance. The Presence of Jesus in the midst of His disciples and in their hearts was what he believed. Only he knew a time would come when this unseen glory would be suddenly revealed. How can we prepare ourselves for that visible Presence of Christ but by dwelling in His hidden Presence now, and remembering that He is by ? all our evil desires affront Him.

29. If ye know that he is righteous, ye know that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him.

Then a righteous life reveals a heavenly birth. It does not tell me how men can become good of themselves, but declares that Divine mercy which has renewed our weakness. All goodness that I see in creatures makes me return thanks to my heavenly Father for His rich gifts to such and such souls.

CHAPTER III.

1. He declareth the singular love of God towards us, in making us his sons: 3. who therefore ought obediently to keep his commandments, 11. as also brotherly to love one another.

BEHOLD, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God: therefore the world knoweth us not, because it knew him not.

Lord, what is man, that thou art mindful of him? What great dignity God has bestowed on my frail nature in making me His child, giving me access to His Throne, letting me live an inward Divine life. And if all this is scoffed at by the world, I will content myself by remembering how my Divine Lord was Himself ignored and despised.

2. Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when he shall appear, we shall be like him; for we shall see him as he is.

This great verse is very high above us, full of things too glorious. It speaks of Christ's appearing, of our beholding God's glory, and so being made like Him. All this we cannot grasp as yet; but let us cling fast to the truth that we are God's children now. This is our true honour. This thought will keep us pure, will keep compassion alive within.

3. And every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he is pure.

Alas! many people have lost hope, and when hope is gone how can we fight on? Yet we, by God's mercy, will keep on hoping in spite of our many falls. We will hope for pure hearts, and peace again, and to be able to do some good, and some day to behold something far better than earth; and we will speak of this hope even to the ignorant and degraded; they, too, must learn to share it.

4. Whosoever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law.

Here are reasons to deter us from sin: 1. It is by its very nature a breach of God's law. He has bidden us be pure, be true, be loving. Every time we sin we contradict God's holy law, and rebel against Him. How great is His holy law, how it reaches through body and soul! O Lord, help me to observe it.

5. And ye know that he was manifested to take away our sins ; and in him is no sin.

2. Sin undoes Christ's work, reverses His Sacrifice, scorns His pattern. There is the greatest possible contrariety between pride, selfishness, or impurity, and the saving work of Christ Jesus. Whatever may be our professions, or devotions, yet if we love sin we cannot be Christ's friends.

6. Whosoever abideth in him sinneth not : whosoever sinneth hath not seen him, neither known him.

3. Sin is withdrawal from Christian communion. It tears us out of that state of salvation in which God has planted us, puts us back into the world, subjects us to our old and hard master instead of the dear Lord's happy service. We are thus linked with devils, with unrepentant and hardened souls, and lose the society of Christ and the saints.

7. Little children, let no man deceive you : he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as he is righteous.

This is a plain test of righteousness, the doing what is right. God will not connive at sin in us because we are believers. He abhors those who claim to be His dear children, and yet allow themselves in wickedness. No knowledge of Scripture, no raptures of devotion, no reverence from men, will make us saints if we are not striving to abhor evil and follow righteousness.

8. He that committeth sin is of the devil ; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil.

Lord, help me to turn a deaf ear to the devil's suggestions. Every day he breathes into my soul some suspicion of God, some whisper of hatred, some unclean fancy; he introduces all manner of malicious and vile thoughts there. Let me so fill my soul with heavenly thoughts, pure prayer, and honest work, that evil may find no place within.

9. Whosoever is born of God doth not commit sin ; for his seed remaineth in him : and he cannot sin, because he is born of God.

Let us claim our true birthright, let us cherish afresh the heavenly seed which God once planted within. Too long we had forgotten that God is our Father, His Spirit our life, His kingdom our hope ; but now Divine mercy has spoken to us and revealed afresh our high calling. What a great light and vision is this when the soul

comes to see what God has done for her, and what a downfall sin would be !

10. *In this the children of God are manifest, and the children of the devil: whosoever doeth not righteousness is not of God, neither he that loveth not his brother.*

Love does great things, if great things come in her way to do, or else love will do the smallest tasks. Love is practical, holy, and upright, not a mere sentiment. Love makes the inward difference between God's children and His enemies. Both alike may be baptized, both attend church, come to the altar, speak of religion, but the one have loving hearts, the other cold hearts.

11. *For this is the message that ye heard from the beginning, that we should love one another.*

The law of love to our brethren was engraven in our hearts by the Creator, proclaimed from Sinai, published afresh by Jesus Christ, shewn in His Life and Death, revived in us by His blessed Spirit, obeyed by all God's saints. Let this holy law be always present to me ; let it rule all my conduct. I have been too ready to forget it.

12. *Not as Cain, who was of that wicked one, and slew his brother. And wherefore slew he him? Because his own works were evil, and his brother's righteous.*

Envy and hatred do not always issue in literal murder, but they are after the pattern of Cain, who first brought such evil tempers into this world. Cain was jealous of his brother, and was thus led on to become the first of murderers. Christ our Saviour is the true Abel ; He offered the best of sacrifices ; He was slain by envy ; His Blood still cries from the ground, though with a voice of mercy. He bids us follow Him in patience.

13. *Marvel not, my brethren, if the world hate you.* **14.** *We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren. He that loveth not his brother abideth in death.*

What a death ! He is dead in God's sight ; his soul is dead to impulses of grace ; he is on the way to eternal death. Love then is life, and a loveless soul is wholly lifeless and barren, however great stir and show of life it has.

15. *Whosoever hateth his brother is a murderer: and ye know that no murderer hath eternal life abiding in him.*

Many Christians allow themselves to use injurious words and have

bitter thoughts against their brethren. They injure their own souls by this ; they provoke God to withdraw His grace from them. I confess with shame my unkind feelings towards some of those whom I meet ; I have never tried to help or sympathise with them, nay, I have even hated and spoken of them as enemies. Lord, how much this behaviour harms my own spiritual life !

16. Hereby perceive we the love of God, because he laid down his life for us : and we ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.

Here is the perfect pattern of self-denying love, God's own Son giving up Himself to die for our sakes. He practised what He preached. Here is the law of sacrifice, under which brave and patient souls have lived and died, following their great Commander. Christ woke up this great force of love in them by His Cross.

17. But whoso hath this world's good, and seeth his brother have need, and shutteth up his bowels of compassion from him, how dwelleth the love of God in him ?

Love does not need occasions of heroic sacrifice, it burns as bright in little things as in great ; it will take trouble to comfort the distressed, will shew itself in humble services and poor gifts. True love will think nothing beneath its notice. May I, who have too long remained insensible to the sufferings of the poor, reflect on this verse and improve my ways.

18. My little children, let us not love in word, neither in tongue ; but in deed and in truth.

Empty words and a deceiving tongue cannot take the place of love. How would you yourself like, in your time of necessity, to meet with nothing but kind words ? How would you like your dear ones to be thus mocked in their sufferings ? Let those who profess to bring Christian consolations to the dying and the needy take care that their ministry is not one of empty words alone.

19. And hereby we know that we are of the truth, and shall assure our hearts before him.

If we feel doubts about our faith or acceptance, if we want more sense of peace, let us try to live a life of active love, and then God will relieve our suspense. What His judgment on us will be we cannot yet say, but love will help us to get ready for it. O great remedy for a perplexed heart ! go and comfort the sorrowful, help the distressed, rescue some soul, and your own way will become clearer.

20. For if our heart condemn us, God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things.

God is great ; He knows what has gone wrong with me ; He is able to set me right again. Away with scruples that torment and perplex me. I cast myself on the abyss of His Fatherly love, fully trusting that He loves me, though He sees me through and through.

21. Beloved, if our heart condemn us not, then have we confidence toward God.

Good works cannot justify us ; no, indeed, they are all imperfect, unworthy in themselves, needing to be sprinkled with Christ's Blood ; and yet they help to reassure our hearts. If God has given us such opportunities of caring for His people, of promoting His glory, of spreading mercy and truth around, and a mind and will to embrace them, then His design for our salvation is more clearly seen.

22. And whatsoever we ask, we receive of him, because we keep his commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in his sight.

Obedience and prayer go together in a Christian. He does his Father's Will, and prays that he may do it better, and that other men may do it also. We are most unworthy, but as members of Christ we have a claim to be heard and helped by our heavenly Father. God regards us as in His Son, and so puts our defects aside.

23. And this is his commandment, That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment.

Here is a simple definition of a true Christian ; he believes in Christ the Lord revealed as our Divine Saviour, and he strives to obey Him by a life of love and duty. Think, has human wisdom ever found nobler aims for man ? Here is enough to kindle love, to awaken humility, to make life endurable and death easy. Only try this plan, and God will give you light to walk by.

24. And he that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.

We were created and regenerated for this purpose, that we might dwell in God, and God by His Holy Spirit in us. In Him is a sure foundation for our weak, frail nature ; His truth and love are our stay. Lord, let this verse come true in my own case ; let me have a constant remembrance of Thee ; take away from my heart all that unfits it for Thy dwelling-place.

CHAPTER IV.

1. He warneth them not to believe all teachers, who boast of the Spirit, but to try them by the rules of the catholick faith : 7. and by many reasons exhorteth to brotherly love.

BELOVED, *believe not every spirit, but try the spirits whether they are of God: because many false prophets are gone out into the world.*

Christians are bound to require proof from those who claim to come with a Divine message. Many spiritual influences are abroad, many startling and amazing works are wrought. God give us grace to discern rightly between His truth and the devil's impostures. God's Spirit is our true inward Guide. May we always listen to His Voice.

2. *Hereby know ye the Spirit of God: Every spirit that confesseth that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is of God: 3. and every spirit that confesseth not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh is not of God: and this is that spirit of antichrist, whereof ye have heard that it should come; and even now already is it in the world.*

Spiritual influences from God upon man are lodged for us in the hands of Jesus Christ. He is the Mediator between God and man ; His Divine and human natures fit Him and Him only to bring God near to our spirits, and lift us up towards God. Unless we confess Christ as God's Son and our Saviour, we shall miss Divine truth and be lost in the subtleties of men. Glory be to God for linking the invisible and visible worlds together in the Person of His dear Son.

4. *Ye are of God, little children, and have overcome them: because greater is he that is in you, than he that is in the world.*

These words should not flatter our pride, nor make us lazy, but give us courage by shewing who fights for us when we fight. It is His victory, not ours. Without Him we experience nothing but defeat and downfall. He is stronger to help than all enemies together to overwhelm.

5. *They are of the world: therefore speak they of the world, and the world heareth them. 6. We are of God: he that*

knoweth God heareth us ; he that is not of God heareth not us. Hereby know we the spirit of truth, and the spirit of error.

God's Church, which has been from the beginning, speaks with a plain voice. Here are creeds and worship and laws which preserve God's truth for us. All true teachers submit to the old faith which the apostles taught and left behind them. Those are sure to be wrong who would set aside the Creed and invent a new faith. We are content with the Catholic Faith which has guided so many generations.

7. Beloved, let us love one another : for love is of God ; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God.

This is a great and high command ; how can we keep it ? In ourselves is no lasting supply of love. No, it must be drawn from God ; the capacity to love must be daily renewed from on high. In our prayers, and when we come to God's altar, we draw from a Fountain of love. Without such exercises of devotion our love is apt to dwindle and wither away.

8. He that loveth not knoweth not God ; for God is love.

Vainly should we boast of wisdom if we had no love. It would not be enough to know all science or all Scripture, to perform all actions of duty or of worship, unless a spark of this fire was alight within. This sentence reveals to us more about the nature of our God than we can learn elsewhere. Such a revelation is a firm anchor to hold by in time of trial.

9. In this was manifested the love of God toward us, because that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him.

Here is the manifestation of Divine love which we can feel most. I look for God's love in stars or suns, in my own life or my own body, and I do not always find it manifest ; clouds come between me and it. But in the life of grace I see it clearly ; faith and hope and prayer are tokens of redeeming love planted in my heart. I can repent, can believe, can give up myself afresh to serve my God, and in all this I see that He loves me.

10. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins.

Here is a simple account of the Atonement ; not fully revealing all its mysteries, but dwelling on our wretchedness, God's mercy, and the perfection of Christ's Sacrifice. Viewed in this light, we see how Christ's Cross meets our needs. Here is a store of truth which we may reflect upon and understand by degrees throughout eternity.

11. Beloved, if God so loved us, we ought also to love one another.

Love, then, is part of our duty. God, Who owed us nothing, has yet given us so much, nay, remitted the great debt that we owed Him; therefore we are bound to shew love to His children, however ill-disposed they may be. Cain's motto was, "Am I my brother's keeper?" but Christians who know God's mercy will readily take their brethren's concerns to heart.

12. No man hath seen God at any time. If we love one another, God dwelleth in us, and his love is perfected in us.

Visible fellowship with God is beyond our nature. We cannot see His face, nor hear His voice, though He is ever near us, but our hearts can rise to the invisible through the visible. O Lord, enable us by loving Thy children to love Thee. Let this life of active love help our hearts to find out Thy infinite perfections. I know God is altogether above me, yet I desire to approach and to love Him as well as a creature can. May I therefore never miss an opportunity of shewing love to any.

13. Hereby know we that we dwell in him, and he in us, because he hath given us of his Spirit.

Shall we not seek to profit more in this school? How little we have yet learnt of the Holy Spirit's ways! We can sing with the Church—

"Thrice-holy Fount, thrice-holy Fire,
Our hearts with heavenly Love inspire."

14. And we have seen and do testify that the Father sent the Son to be the Saviour of the world.

We have seen with adoring wonder, we testify with patience and courage, we know of a Divine remedy, an infinite mercy, something that can transform the world and plant hope again in despairing hearts. O blessed message and happy witnesses! may our turn come to declare it thus.

15. Whosoever shall confess that Jesus is the Son of God, God dwelleth in him, and he in God.

Grant, Lord, that as I have been brought up in the true confession of Thy dear Son's Godhead, I may remain stedfast in it, hold fast all the creed which follows from it, extend this faith among my brethren, and end this mortal life with it on my lips. Let all I have of means or talents be used to spread this faith among men.

16. And we have known and believed the love that God hath

to us. God is love; and he that dwelleth in love dwelleth in God, and God in him.

What an infinite misery it would be to doubt that there is a loving God! Then all would become dark and hopeless. Wise and great minds have been thus overwhelmed, but we who are simple people have a sure anchor to hold by. We know what God's love has been to ourselves, and thereby we reckon how great it is to the world.

17. Herein is our love made perfect, that we may have boldness in the day of judgment: because as he is, so are we in this world.

O high and lofty words! How can we in this world be as Jesus is? We cannot indeed rise to His spotless pattern, but we can abide in God by love and trust; we can put away all that separates us from our heavenly Father; we can thus copy Christ's ways, and so be at peace. The thought of the last judgment will thus bring awe with it, but not confusion.

18. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment. He that feareth is not made perfect in love.

Fear is the feeling that God is against us; love the feeling that He is for us. Thus, as we advance in the Christian life, fear will diminish and love increase. Yet there is a certain fear, meaning reverence, awe, a sense of our own nothingness, which must ever remain, and befits a creature.

19. We love him, because he first loved us.

The command is not, "Love, and then God will love you," but it is, "Love, because God has loved you and made you able to love." The thought of all God's undeserved goodness to us, how His mercy sought us out and found us, stirs up some love in our dull, cold hearts towards our Divine Friend, and then to His friends. May we blow up this spark into a steady flame, not let gusts of passion extinguish it.

20. If a man say, I love God, and hateth his brother, he is a liar: for he that loveth not his brother whom he hath seen, how can he love God whom he hath not seen?

We have opportunities every day of shewing love; souls to bear with, comfort, or forgive, necessities of our brethren to minister to. What folly it would be to spend our thoughts in meditating on the love of God, and meanwhile throw aside the very opportunities which the dear Lord has put in our way to train us in loving!

21. And this commandment have we from him, That he who loveth God love his brother also.

Lord, shew us how to cherish love towards Thee by contemplation and prayer, and yet discharge earnestly all active duties of love to our brethren. Shew us also how to love our brethren and yet abhor what evil there is in them. Only Divine wisdom can teach us how to be loving and yet pure and upright in all our ways.

CHAPTER V.

- 1. He that loveth God loveth his children, and keepeth his commandments : 3. which to the faithful are light, and not grievous. 9. Jesus is the Son of God, able to save us, 14. and to hear our prayers, which we make for ourselves, and for others.*

WHOSOEVER believeth that Jesus is the Christ is born of God : and every one that loveth him that begat loveth him also that is begotten of him.

Believers are regenerate and made God's children by adoption and grace ; they seek to be daily renewed by His Holy Spirit. What a great tie is this between all those who possess it ! They have found out that God loves them, that His Son has become manifest for their salvation, that His quickening Spirit gives them strength. O happy discovery which God enlightens our souls to discern, and which changes all the face of things for us !

- 2. By this we know that we love the children of God, when we love God, and keep his commandments.*

Love of God and love towards our brethren mutually confirm and approve each other. They may be distinct in theory, but in reality they cannot be separated. We cannot well possess the one unless the other goes with it. O blessed union of loving hearts in a common love and obedience to their heavenly Father ! Let us, O Lord, rather experience all this than talk of it.

- 3. For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments : and his commandments are not grievous.*

Not grievous, because the prospect of heaven makes us able to despise the world. Also, because religion becomes our daily delight and comfort ; also, because our whole reason and experience goes along with what God enjoins ; also, because Jesus and His saints help us by their example. Yes, God helps our weak natures by His victorious grace.

4. For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world : and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith.

Faith is the watchword of Christ's soldiers, the strength on which they rely. Against faith there is no answer. Temptations and perplexities give way before one who believes. Faith cannot see or touch, but it is sure of God's righteousness and mercy, though appearances be against it. Faith stands firm against pain, and shame, and death.

5. Who is he that overcometh the world, but he that believeth that Jesus is the Son of God ?

Search and look ; who else in the world can overcome, and bear, and love, except one who believes in Christ, the Divine Saviour of men ? Here alone is a sure talisman amidst the rough shocks of the fight. It is members of Christ, those who trust to His Cross for pardon, to His life for strength, that have this great secret which makes them invincible. O my God, make me know it !

6. This is he that came by water and blood, even Jesus Christ ; not by water only, but by water and blood. And it is the Spirit that beareth witness, because the Spirit is truth.

Jesus came to live for us ; His Baptism in the water of Jordan was the entrance upon His Divine ministry as our Teacher and Pattern. Also He came to die for us ; His Blood was shed for our sake on the Cross ; there He was our Propitiation. Also He came to renew our dull hearts by the might of His Spirit, which He poured down at Pentecost. All these parts of Christ's work blend into one, and unite to tell us Who He is.

7. For there are three that bear record in heaven, the Father, the Word, and the Holy Ghost : and these three are one. 8. And there are three that bear witness in earth, the spirit, and the water, and the blood : and these three agree in one.

The water used at the font to signify God's purifying grace cleansing us from stain, and making us His children ; the blood spiritually exhibited at the altar beneath a sacramental sign ; the Holy Spirit from age to age quickening hearts and raising up witnesses for Christ,—all these three unite to tell us of salvation. It is true, God loves us, grace will win, peace and holiness can be ours again.

9. If we receive the witness of men, the witness of God is greater : for this is the witness of God which he hath testified of his Son.

Do we know less of Christ now than those knew who saw Him in

the flesh? No, for we still possess the best of all testimony, that of God Himself. He has witnessed for us not only in the institution of holy ordinances, but by a new life that has come into the world and extended even to our own hearts.

10. He that believeth on the Son of God hath the witness in himself: he that believeth not God hath made him a liar; because he believeth not the record that God gave of his Son.

Lord, I believe. Help me to believe more firmly. I acknowledge the wealth of testimony that Thou hast given me. May I never by deadly sin blind my eyes and stop my ears so as to become insensible to Thy witness. May I rather be always learning of Thee, and so believe and know more.

11. And this is the record, that God hath given to us eternal life, and this life is in his Son. 12. He that hath the Son hath life; and he that hath not the Son of God hath not life.

O life, what a gift it is, even our frail earthly life! What is so precious, so mysterious, so Divine? But this life soon begins to fade; we look for an undying life, where body and soul will be perfected, whence death will be banished. Only God's Son can give us this. His friends have such a hope, which bears them up through death; they know what He is to them now, and so they trust Him for the time to come.

13. These things have I written unto you that believe on the name of the Son of God; that ye may know that ye have eternal life, and that ye may believe on the name of the Son of God.

Then it is no presumption for me to say, "I have eternal life." S. John would teach me that very persuasion; he would assure me that my faith in Christ Jesus gives me already a share in eternal life, bids me live as in heaven, bids me triumph over all adversities that come. May I cling fast to this blessedness which has so mercifully been granted to me even here and now. May no blasts of temptation extinguish it.

14. And this is the confidence that we have in him, that, if we ask any thing according to his will, he heareth us: 15. and if we know that he hear us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of him.

Our prayers work with God's gracious Will. He desires that evil be overcome and removed from His creation. We desire this also;

we entreat Him to accomplish it. He is our Father ; we have experienced innumerable mercies at His hands ; we know how good He has been to others, and therefore we go on earnestly pleading for our brethren and for ourselves. Is it nothing to be able to commit our anxieties into the hands of One so wise and compassionate ? He does not indeed let us see clearly the whole plan of His dealings, but yet our prayers bring us comfort.

16. If any man see his brother sin a sin which is not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death : I do not say that he shall pray for it.

Then some of the sins that I see are not unto death ; they do not utterly cut the soul off from repentance or quench intercession made for it, while other sins are unto death, kill faith and love utterly, stop the mouth of prayer. How can I tell which sins are of the first sort, and which of the second ? Be assured that so long as there is any hatred of evil left, any faith in Christ's Cross, any longing to repent, evil has not utterly killed good in the sinner. Prayer may still go up for him. Lord, help me to pray with a more earnest heart, that so I may be heard.

17. All unrighteousness is sin : and there is a sin not unto death.

Sin interrupts our communion with God ; it is a darkness creeping over our inward sight, a stain growing on our white robe, a disease weakening our spiritual health. May we be enabled to discern the evil and arrest it by repentance before it grows beyond any physician's skill.

18. We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not ; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not.

Here follow three maxims which Christians know well. What a comfort in this uncertain, confused world to have any truths clear and plain to lay hold of : 1. Christian life has its own power. Divine mercy protects God's children in their simplicity ; they are able to withstand temptation. This is our first fact. We cannot help noticing the victory which those win who trust in God only.

19. And we know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness.

2. Christian life has its own light ; it enjoys a brightness which is absolutely unknown to unbelievers. All the wisdom of the heathen world was but darkness, all its grandeur slavery, compared with the condition of God's children. That is our second fact, the difference which it makes whether we know of a Father in heaven or not.

20. *And we know that the Son of God is come, and hath given us an understanding, that we may know him that is true, and we are in him that is true, even in his Son Jesus Christ. This is the true God, and eternal life.*

3. Christian life is union with Jesus Christ. Absolute truth and perfect goodness indeed reign unembodied in heaven, but yet in a real sense they have appeared on earth below in the visible form of Mary's Son, Who lived and died here, and knits us to Himself. This is our third fact. Christ's Divine words, His grace, His risen power, are so much added to the spiritual store of mankind. May we find this communion with God through Christ come true in our own case.

21. *Little children, keep yourselves from idols. Amen.*

Beware of idols; not merely those which are framed of gold or marble, but those which your own minds and hearts frame and set in God's place. Worship God alone, as revealed in Christ Jesus. All other faith will end in darkness, all other love in disappointment.

THE SECOND EPISTLE OF JOHN.

1. He exhorteth a certain honourable matron, with her children, to persevere in Christian love and belief, 8. lest they lose the reward of their former profession: 10. and to have nothing to do with those seducers that bring not the true doctrine of Christ Jesus.

THE elder unto the elect lady and her children, whom I love in the truth; and not I only, but also all they that have known the truth; 2. for the truth's sake, which dwelleth in us, and shall be with us for ever.

Truth sanctifies love and knowledge; it abides with us and guides us towards heaven; there it will be ours in still fuller measure. S. John was united to this lady and her family by their common devotion to Divine truth. That is the real tie of union, which neither age nor distance wears out.

3. *Grace be with you, mercy, and peace, from God the Father, and from the Lord Jesus Christ, the Son of the Father, in truth and love.*

The gospel offers on God's part free grace, tender mercy, peace to abide within, and all this as revealed to us with truth and in love. Truth and love are S. John's two watchwords. He thought of them more and more as the evening of his days drew on. He recognised Divine truth and Divine love both expressed in the person of his Master.

4. *I rejoiced greatly that I found of thy children walking in truth, as we have received a commandment from the Father.*

Lord, may I always be found walking in truth, ever pressing onwards, ever sincere and upright, the same at home as abroad, the same in dark days as in sunshine. May I live as I pray.

5. *And now I beseech thee, lady, not as though I wrote a new commandment unto thee, but that which we had from the beginning, that we love one another.*

Love is no mere sentiment or fancy. It draws us not only towards those whom we are akin to, or who are pleasant to us. No, it is obedience to our heavenly Father's Will, which is declared to us through all Scripture. This is true love, to live for God's sake, and as He would have us.

6. And this is love, that we walk after his commandments. This is the commandment, That, as ye have heard from the beginning, ye should walk in it.

Keep me, Lord, in the old ways. May I retain what I have heard from the beginning, the commandments and examples of my early days. May my life need no sudden break or great change, but only the faster hold and fuller practice of good things learnt in childhood.

7. For many deceivers are entered into the world, who confess not that Jesus Christ is come in the flesh. This is a deceiver and an antichrist.

This is a denial of the whole gospel. If God's Son did not come in the flesh, truly a man like us, with man's soul and body, born to suffer and to die, then we are not redeemed. If the gospel is a fable, a sweet dream, an unfulfilled longing, then shut up the New Testament, and let us try some other religion. God keep in us a firm faith in the reality of His dear Son's work.

8. Look to yourselves, that we lose not those things which we have wrought, but that we receive a full reward.

God rewards liberally all work done in His Name. Let us only persevere unto the end, and we shall find He has not deceived us. Indeed His reward is far above our labour, and the very power to do any good work is the gift of His mercy.

9. Whosoever transgresseth, and abideth not in the doctrine of Christ, hath not God. He that abideth in the doctrine of Christ, he hath both the Father and the Son.

This is an age of progress. Men pursue with eagerness every path of knowledge. Yet, if they go beyond the old truths of the gospel, they lose instead of gaining. Here we cannot develop any further; here is plain truth as God has taught it. Lord, make us so value Thy holy gospel that we may cling fast to it, whatever else of new knowledge come to us.

10. If there come any unto you, and bring not this doctrine, receive him not into your house, neither bid him God speed: 11. for he that biddeth him God speed is partaker of his evil deeds.

Lord, I desire to beware of those who would unsettle my faith in Christ. If I lost that, what could take its place? As I would guard my ears from impure words, so I would from unbelieving or blasphemous suggestions, lest they take root within. My Saviour's honour is dear to me, but may I uphold it in all humility and charity.

12. *Having many things to write unto you, I would not write with paper and ink: but I trust to come unto you, and speak face to face, that our joy may be full.* 13. *The children of thy elect sister greet thee. Amen.*

Not by paper and ink, but by the living spoken word was the gospel first spread; and even now that is God's ordinary way of converting souls. We are grateful for good books, yet good friends are a still more precious gift. May we use both so as to know our God more and love Him better.

THE THIRD EPISTLE OF JOHN.

He commendeth Gaius for his piety, 5. and hospitality 7. to true preachers : 9. complaining of the unkind dealing of ambitious Diotrephes on the contrary side, 11. whose evil example is not to be followed : 12. and giveth special testimony to the good report of Demetrius.

THE elder unto the wellbeloved Gaius, whom I love in the truth. 2. Beloved, I wish above all things that thou mayest prosper and be in health, even as thy soul prospereth.

The apostle, in writing this short note to his friend, desires for him temporal blessings as well as spiritual. He knew that his friend's soul was thriving, and he longed that his health and affairs might thrive too. So ought we to have a tender thought for our dear ones' welfare, and commend to God their bodies and souls alike.

3. For I rejoiced greatly, when the brethren came and testified of the truth that is in thee, even as thou walkest in the truth. 4. I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth.

Here is true faith issuing in a true life. Those who have true faith in their hearts, and bear true allegiance to their heavenly Father, are the persons to be depended on to discharge the various duties of life. They live as in God's Presence ; they have one rule for darkness and for light. This is the best of all joys, to find our dear children turning out thus ; it is better than if they had all possible talents or riches.

5. Beloved, thou doest faithfully whatsoever thou doest to the brethren, and to strangers ; 6. which have borne witness of thy charity before the church : whom if thou bring foward on their journey after a godly sort, thou shalt do well :

We too are strangers, far from our true home, journeying towards heaven. Christ the Lord has welcomed us, lodged us in His Church, set us on the right road. May we be mindful of His mercy, and shew like love to those who need it.

7. Because that for his name's sake they went forth, taking nothing of the Gentiles.

Either persecutions drove them out, or a zeal to spread the gospel. In either case they had to part with this world's goods, and depend upon Christian charity. No doubt they were able to speak convincingly about that Master whose love was to them instead of all else. The more we give up for Him the more precious we shall find His love.

8. We therefore ought to receive such, that we might be fellowhelpers to the truth.

It is little I can do to help the truth, but let me do what I can. A few prayers, a few alms, some poor words or plain deeds of mine may be a small contribution towards the great victory of good. Let me only not hinder God's cause by my selfishness. I am a soldier in the great army, and so must fill my place, obey the orders given me, and thus contribute my share to the right.

9. I wrote unto the church: but Diotrephes, who loveth to have the preeminence among them, receiveth us not. 10. Wherefore, if I come, I will remember his deeds which he doeth, prating against us with malicious words: and not content therewith, neither doth he himself receive the brethren, and forbiddeth them that would, and casteth them out of the church.

Be warned against those faults which crept in even in S. John's day. Here we notice disobedience, ambition, bitter words, and unkind dealings. Diotrephes sought for authority and dignity, and this pursuit led him into so much evil. May I rejoice at being in a humble place, where I am less exposed to temptation.

11. Beloved, follow not that which is evil, but that which is good. He that doeth good is of God: but he that doeth evil hath not seen God.

God gives us good examples, in order that by following them we may rise nearer to Him. God's saints are shewn to us, not for our worship, but for our imitation. All good that there is in them came straight from the eternal Fountain of all goodness. Let us praise God for His gifts richly bestowed on His servants.

12. Demetrius hath good report of all men, and of the truth itself: yea, and we also bear record; and ye know that our record is true.

Demetrius seems to have been a quiet, steady lover of goodness. He was one whom the apostle recommended, and knew that

Christians would recommend. One day all pretension and falsehood will flee away, and we shall see God's true servants manifest in the reality of their love and purity, with all misunderstandings removed.

13. I had many things to write, but I will not with ink and pen write unto thee: 14. but I trust I shall shortly see thee, and we shall speak face to face. Peace be to thee. Our friends salute thee. Greet the friends by name.

O great apostle, may we be one day permitted to see thy face and hear all thy message ! We have learnt by thy means many truths about Christ's glory and His humiliation, but we desire to fill up our knowledge in the clearer light of heaven. Thy writings are so many greetings from God to us, fitted to plant truth and love within, but we long for a clearer knowledge and deeper peace than earth can bestow.

THE GENERAL EPISTLE OF JUDE.

He exhorteth them to be constant in the profession of the faith. 4. False teachers are crept in to seduce them : for whose damnable doctrine and manners horrible punishment is prepared : 20. whereas the godly, by the assistance of the Holy Spirit, and prayers to God, may persevere, and grow in grace, and keep themselves, and recover others out of the snares of those deceivers.

JUDE, the servant of Jesus Christ, and brother of James, to them that are sanctified by God the Father, and preserved in Jesus Christ, and called :

If the writer had wished to glorify himself, he might have dwelt upon his own kinship to Christ the Lord, but he prefers the title of "servant of Christ and brother of James." Christ's servants are bound to obey Him, to wait on His people, to be diligent in His business. They have to tell their brethren of that exceeding love and mercy which has sought them out, and which is able to preserve them safe through all the dangers of life. They say, "Do not distrust God's love ; be sure He can and will save you."

2. Mercy unto you, and peace, and love, be multiplied.

Mercy is that pity or Divine compassion with which God looked on us and devised our redemption ; peace is that reconciliation through Christ's Death whereby we have found pardon ; love is that indwelling of the Holy Spirit which unites us to each other and to our God. All this gracious work has been begun by God in us. May it be perfected and brought to a happy end.

3. Beloved, when I gave all diligence to write unto you of the common salvation, it was needful for me to write unto you, and exhort you that ye should earnestly contend for the faith which was once delivered unto the saints.

Is it not just as needful that we should earnestly contend for the catholic faith in these days ? It is a precious jewel which may be stolen from us. Many despise or even hate it ; the devil and all his hosts pour daily scorn upon it. But remember that there is

nothing else to take its place. If we lose our faith in God's Providence, in the love and mercy of Christ Jesus, in Scripture, in the Holy Sacrament, in the promises of heaven, where can we find anything else to comfort, sustain, or guide us? It would be an infinite loss to have parted with this precious faith.

4. For there are certain men crept in unawares, who were before of old ordained to this condemnation, ungodly men, turning the grace of our God into lasciviousness, and denying the only Lord God, and our Lord Jesus Christ.

These false teachers went wrong in two ways : (1) They turned liberty into licence, allowing men to break the law of purity and gratify their passions without blame ; (2) They denied the supreme Godhead and true manhood of Christ Jesus, made light of His atoning Sacrifice, doubted His Resurrection. He became as nothing in their system. Lord, we recognise these same two errors in our own day. Grant us stedfast purity and sound faith in Thy dear Son, that we may stand firm against deceivers. We desire no other guide but Thy holy Will, no rule but Thy commandments.

5. I will therefore put you in remembrance, though ye once knew this, how that the Lord, having saved the people out of the land of Egypt, afterward destroyed them that believed not.

Here are three separate examples of sin visited with Divine judgment ; we should read of them with awe, recognising our own danger. The first is that of unbelief. The Israelites who were rescued out of Egypt yet missed entrance into Canaan and perished in the wilderness, because they doubted of God's Presence among them. They disbelieved in their holy calling, in God's glorious promises, in His strength to perform them, and so they never saw the promised land. We too have been redeemed from bondage, brought through the Red Sea, set on the road towards a better country. May God keep fresh in our minds what His mercies and promises are.

6. And the angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, he hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day.

The second sin is pride. God created the angels with excellent gifts, set them high in heaven, near His Throne ; yet some of them rebelled against God and chose to be His enemies. Their pride brought them down from heaven to hell, from light to darkness, from the joy and peace of God's Presence to the restless misery and hateful schemes of evil in which they now dwell. If God has given us great privileges, let us remain in humility, knowing that we are His creatures, and depend wholly on Him.

7. Even as Sodom and Gomorrha, and the cities about them in like manner, giving themselves over to fornication, and going after strange flesh, are set forth for an example, suffering the vengeance of eternal fire.

The third sin denounced is uncleanness. The citizens of Sodom and Gomorrah were destroyed on account of their deadly sins of impurity, and the place was rendered desolate, as it now is. If God does not now send down literal fire and brimstone upon such sins, yet remember that they assuredly bring ruin ; they harden the heart, quench all sparks of love and pity, render it quite impossible for Divine grace to enter. Be assured that they bring a most certain vengeance on the bodies, the lives, the hearts of those who live for them.

8. Likewise also these filthy dreamers defile the flesh, despise allomination, and speak evil of dignities.

Surely it is dreaming when we indulge our evil desires, and yet think to be heirs of heaven where nothing defiled can enter, or when we despise and revile our superiors, and yet profess ourselves disciples of the meek and lowly Jesus. How contrary to the gospel spirit is the behaviour of many church-people who are full of scorn and contempt for those whom God has set over them !

9. Yet Michael the archangel, when contending with the devil he disputed about the body of Moses, durst not bring against him a railing accusation, but said, The Lord rebuke thee.

We are told (Deut. xxxiv.) that Moses died on Mount Nebo, and was buried there by God, and that no man knew the place of his sepulchre. What is this strange history about the angel and the devil disputing for his body ? Indeed we know not ; it seems to have been a legend current among the Jews. S. Jude drew this lesson from it that we should speak quietly and patiently to those who differ from us, should be respectful in our behaviour, should recognise the position which others hold.

10. But these speak evil of those things which they know not : but what they know naturally, as brute beasts, in those things they corrupt themselves.

Has not this been the case since ? Do we not find keen disputing on religious subjects combined with great errors of practice ? Jude was horrified to see those who claimed to be Christ's followers, while laying down the law on Christian doctrine, yet descending to the level of heathen vices. This is all wrong, he said, both false teaching and foul ways. May God put in our hearts a modest temper, that we may adore Divine mysteries and fear sin.

11. Woe unto them! for they have gone in the way of Cain, and ran greedily after the error of Balaam for reward, and perished in the gainsaying of Core.

Cain was envious, Balaam covetous, Korah rebellious. Here are three more warnings from the Old Testament. God meant us to read Scripture in a practical spirit, so as to apply its lessons to our own time. How many Christians fall into sin through envy and jealousy, sell their souls for gain, profane or despise God's holy ordinances! Their downfall and sad end are sketched out in these histories.

12. These are spots in your feasts of charity, when they feast with you, feeding themselves without fear: clouds they are without water, carried about of winds; trees whose fruit withereth, without fruit, twice dead, plucked up by the roots;

These false Christians thought only of pleasing their own appetite; they were as useless as barren clouds and unfruitful trees. The apostle heaps up figures to express the lowness of their aims, their empty vanity, their profitless life. He abhorred religious profession without the fruits of righteousness.

13. Raging waves of the sea, foaming out their own shame; wandering stars, to whom is reserved the blackness of darkness for ever.

The sea-waves made a great noise and stir, yet left nothing behind them but a little dirty foam. The meteors gleamed out bright for a moment, but only left the darkness deeper than before. Such are the lives of those who live for self, and not for God. Those who serve Him in truth are like refreshing brooks and constant shining stars that never fail.

14. And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousand of his saints, 15. to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.

The doctrine of the Day of Judgment is very ancient. God's saints have always looked forward to that day. His enemies have had an uneasy fear of it. Indeed the latter have tried hard to reason themselves out of this faith, but there still remained deep in their hearts a consciousness of their own wickedness, and a dread lest God should take vengeance. Cruelty and vice and profaneness pass away, but yet they have all been written down in God's Book. He remembers; He will repay. Just as surely as He repays the

self-sacrifice of His friends, their love and duty, so will His wrath find out sinners.

16. These are murmurers, complainers, walking after their own lusts ; and their mouth speaketh great swelling words, having men's persons in admiration because of advantage.

Beware of indulging discontent, either with the Church wherein you live, or with God's wise Providence, or with other men's treatment of you. To repine or grumble is a dangerous exercise, and apt to indispose us altogether for serving God. Look rather at your own faults, and you will find ample opportunity to begin a reform there. Further, avoid flattering any one. If you are wont to realise God's Presence, and seek after His promises, then this world's grandeurs will not seem so amazing ; they are not worth the compromise of our truth and modesty ; they have no such great gifts to bestow.

17. But, beloved, remember ye the words which were spoken before of the apostles of our Lord Jesus Christ ; 18. how that they told you there should be mockers in the last time, who should walk after their own ungodly lusts.

The apostles were intrusted with Christ's doctrine, set it up in a visible society, explained and applied it, spoke of its power. It was in their mouths a quickening force renewing the world. Still, they looked forward to, and saw the beginnings of, great abuses among Christians ; they foretold days in which Christian profession and heathen life, Christian names and unbelieving thoughts, should go together. Such days have come now, and we live in them.

19. These be they who separate themselves, sensual, having not the Spirit.

These thought themselves superior to the common run of Christians, laid claim to a high spirituality and deep knowledge of heavenly things ; but look at their life, there you will see how far they are from this boasted perfection. Their evil words, jealousies, selfish passions, speak for them. God's grace cannot ally itself with sinful words and ways.

20. But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost,

Let us join together a deep mistrust of ourselves and a hearty confidence in our God. He has laid the foundation and He will perfect it. Our own frailty and the presence of tempters or enemies only make us rely the more on His grace.

21. Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life.

We observe in these last two verses that a right faith in the Presence and help of the adorable Trinity, Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, is our foundation. If we rest firmly on that we may look for Divine mercy when we need it most. We have great experience of God's mercy here, yet this is but a foretaste of somewhat better to come.

22. And of some have compassion, making a difference : 23. and others save with fear, pulling them out of the fire ; hating even the garment spotted by the flesh.

Do not despair of any sinner ; persevere as you have opportunity in labouring at his conversion by warnings and prayers. If you have felt your own weakness you will be forbearing with those who have gone astray. What patience, unwearied labour, upright intention, is required by one who would convert sinners ! God's grace is almighty, and works even by our weak means. What comfort or reward is equal to that of winning souls to God ?

24. Now unto him that is able to keep you from falling, and to present you faultless before the presence of his glory with exceeding joy,

To Him be the praise (1) for preservation from downfalls,—how near has our ruin been, time after time !—and (2) for washing away our stains. The best of us need this often ; and yet all absolutions here are but pledges of that full pardon which the Judge will one day pronounce over His servants.

25. To the only wise God our Saviour, be glory and majesty, dominion and power, both now and ever. Amen.

Dear friend, do you take care to pay all honour and glory to God ? Here is a solemn question with which to end our reflections on this Epistle. Do you remember what He has done for you, consecrate a good portion of your time and means to His service, take care that your children and household glorify Him ? It would be a shame if, while heaven and earth echo His praises, you and yours stood outside that choir and were dumb.

THE REVELATION OF ST. JOHN THE DIVINE.

CHAPTER I

4. John writeth his revelation to the seven churches of Asia, signified by the seven golden candlesticks. 7. The coming of Christ. 14. His glorious power and majesty.

THE Revelation of Jesus Christ, which God gave unto him, to shew unto his servants things which must shortly come to pass ; and he sent and signified it by his angel unto his servant John :

Let us prepare to listen to Christ the Lord, Who reveals to us in this Book great mysteries of glory, of wrath, and of mercy. His servants approach the study of it with reverence, not expecting to understand it all, yet knowing that it was written for their learning. They expect to find there many hard sayings, but also messages, comforts, warnings, from their dear Lord and Master. What they cannot understand as yet they devoutly leave. What they comprehend gives them new thoughts about God's love and majesty.

2. Who bare record of the word of God, and of the testimony of Jesus Christ, and of all things that he saw.

That was S. John's work, to bear record. He enjoyed the special favours of Christ's love, witnessed His deepest mysteries, heard His most secret words, and yet not for his own sake, but for ours. In his youth the Incarnate Lord had chosen him to be His friend. When he was growing old this same Divine Friend brought him from heaven fresh grace and enlightenment. Who could tell us so well as S. John what the gospel really is? Christ's true Godhead, true manhood, His atoning Death, His resurrection life, are the substance of His message.

3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words

of this prophecy, and keep those things which are written therein : for the time is at hand.

Here is great encouragement to us to study the Revelation. It was first given to Christians in times of great trial to be their comfort and support. All the world was against them, so God supplied them with a Divine strength in this Book ; but we, too, have persecution, ridicule, temptations to withstand ; we, too, have to suffer and to die ; our faith waxes dull, our love cold. Therefore we have a share in the warnings, visions, and promises that follow. Holy Scripture was not complete till this sacred book was reckoned with it.

4. **J**OHN to the seven churches which are in Asia : Grace be unto you, and peace, from him which is, and which was, and which is to come ; and from the seven Spirits which are before his throne ; 5. and from Jesus Christ, who is the faithful witness, and the first begotten of the dead, and the prince of the kings of the earth.

Grace and peace from the Holy and Blessed Trinity to lost mankind. Here are disclosed to us God the Father Almighty, the One Eternal God, and the Holy Spirit Whose seven gifts renew the heart, and the Son of God Who rose from the grave to win immortality for us. This is the holy catholic faith which was invoked over us at our baptism, has been our stay all through life, and is our best guide through this world's darkness. May God keep us in this faith, and let us find its full blessings.

Unto him that loved us, and washed us from our sins in his own blood, 6. and hath made us kings and priests unto God and his Father ; to him be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

O Lord, let Thy love still rest upon us, Thy Blood wash out all our stains, Thy holy calling be perfectly fulfilled in our lives. We are Thy kingdom, wherein Thy grace should reign, and subdue body and soul to Thy service. We are priests to offer unto Thee a holy sacrifice of ourselves and our work. All power and glory is Thine. We shall find our best happiness in obeying Thy Blessed Will, and trusting Thee for all things.

7. *Behold, he cometh with clouds ; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him : and all kindreds of the earth shall wail because of him. Even so, Amen.*

Before that awful day comes we should consider Christ crucified. His Sacred Wounds should be our comfort and a pledge of Divine mercy to us. Thus we shall turn away God's wrath, and have no

reason to despair when the Judge appears. Indeed that great day will be full of fear for all, and yet believers will trust Him Who has redeemed them. Those who have treated Christ's Name with contempt, outraged His servants, disobeyed His laws, will be much ashamed in His Presence.

8. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the ending, saith the Lord, which is, and which was, and which is to come, the Almighty.

Thou art, O God, the perfection of all things, their source and aim, their strength and life. Thou art worthy to receive my heart's best worship. Creatures fail or deceive me, but in Thee alone is my refuge. I am but a feeble creature, and of a short time, but Thy glory remains. I become immortal by union with Thee, Who livest for ever.

9. I John, who also am your brother, and companion in tribulation, and in the kingdom and patience of Jesus Christ, was in the isle that is called Patmos, for the word of God, and for the testimony of Jesus Christ.

It is in times of affliction that this Book of Revelation is most valued, for it was written for such times ; it bears the marks of persecution all through. S. John had been separated from his friends, sentenced to imprisonment at Patmos, and God recompensed His sufferings by showing him glorious visions. Instead of earth, heaven was opened to him. For his friends' society he found Christ the Lord and His angels. In our happy days we are too much taken up with this earth ; we need suffering to cleanse our eyesight and open invisible things to us.

10. I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day, and heard behind me a great voice, as of a trumpet,

The Lord's Day was marked to S. John by this great vision which he is now going to describe. He was unable to join in the Blessed Sacrament, to preach or hear God's Word, so God Himself supplied his needs. Our Sundays are given us to lift up our minds towards heaven ; they are meant to be times of refreshing for the soul, when we can think about our true country and inheritance. How unhappy those are whose Sundays are wholly given over to this world's business or pleasure ! they miss the best and happiest hours.

11. Saying, I am Alpha and Omega, the first and the last : and, What thou seest, write in a book, and send it unto the seven churches which are in Asia ; unto Ephesus, and unto

Smyrna, and unto Pergamos, and unto Thyatira, and unto Sardis, and unto Philadelphia, and unto Laodicea.

Why are these seven Churches chosen, neither more nor less, out of all the great number of Christian communities throughout the world? They were under S. John's own eye, in that part of Asia where he lived; their warfare, their shortcomings, their hopes were near to his heart. So God sent them a message through him. Yet indeed they represent the whole catholic Church of Christ; we are meant to look for ourselves there. While the particular case of such and such Christians is considered, the words are so framed that we ourselves too can draw guidance therefrom. Christ the Lord, though unseen, sees what is doing in His Church, and reproves or praises accordingly.

12. And I turned to see the voice that spake with me. And being turned, I saw seven golden candlesticks; 13. and in the midst of the seven candlesticks one like unto the Son of man, clothed with a garment down to the foot, and girt about the paps with a golden girdle.

Let us have faith to see in the Church a Divine society, illuminated by God's truth, filled with His grace, and where Christ Himself dwells. He is the true Priest, He intercedes for us; all our sacrifices have value only as joined with His one Offering. The world's eye can see nothing of all this, but those who have experienced Divine comfort and strength will know whence it comes; they will discern a Divine Friend there Who welcomes them and speaks to their hearts.

14. His head and his hairs were white like wool, as white as snow; and his eyes were as a flame of fire; 15. and his feet like unto fine brass, as if they burned in a furnace; and his voice as the sound of many waters. 16. And he had in his right hand seven stars: and out of his mouth went a sharp two-edged sword: and his countenance was as the sun shineth in his strength.

Christ the Lord appears here just as He did on the Mount of Transfiguration; all His Humanity seems lost in His Godhead. He is wrapt in light, full of awful majesty. We dare not lift up our eyes to behold Him; how can we survey that unapproachable light? What communion is there between such a being and ourselves? No, this aspect is put on to teach us Who He is. He is terrible to His enemies, He searches all hearts; but yet He has never forgotten His earthly life, His mother's home, all the gracious mysteries and sufferings of His sojourn here below. Do not distrust Him, He has promised to be with us always; He is full of love, though raised to the Throne of heaven.

17. And when I saw him, I fell at his feet as dead. And he laid his right hand upon me, saying unto me, Fear not; I am the first and the last: 18. I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive for evermore, Amen; and have the keys of hell and of death.

Thus Jesus Christ reassured His apostle. Indeed He is the Mighty God, the Eternal Source of all life, high above our frail existence, but yet He has known what it is to live on earth, and to die, and to rise again. Thus He has authority over death and life. Observe these three stages in Christ's work. He died; He began a new undying life from the grave; He took on Himself all power. We may take courage from these words. Our Master is no mere man, but the Lord of Glory. His servants need not fear anything in this world or beyond it while they are doing His work. If they believe in Him they will share His life and glory.

19. Write the things which thou hast seen, and the things which are, and the things which shall be hereafter;

John had to write the vision of Christ glorified which he had now witnessed, and the facts and warnings about the state of the Seven Churches which follow, and the long series of wonderful visions of things to come, which fill up the rest of this Book. He had to write this on Christ's authority and for our learning. God knew that there were souls sorely tried and tempted and overburdened in this world of trouble, to whom the declarations of this Book would be the message that they needed. Against triumphant wickedness, and the world's great glory, and the seductions of pleasant sins, how great a remedy to turn to the searching, awful, and mysterious truths that are here disclosed!

20. The mystery of the seven stars which thou sawest in my right hand, and the seven golden candlesticks. The seven stars are the angels of the seven churches: and the seven candlesticks which thou sawest are the seven churches.

If the angels here indicated by stars are the chief pastors, or (as we should say) Bishops of each Church, how great a dignity they enjoy! They are near Christ, are in His hand, He gives them their place and work, they move as He bids them. Pastors who sought only ease or dignity in their ministry would be very unlike Christ's own burning stars, full of heavenly light, guiding men on the way to Him. Often the Church and her ministers are so worldly that it is hard to see there the light of God's grace, and yet He keeps it burning. Its true flame is fed by Him; He knows His own.

CHAPTER II.

What is commanded to be written to the angels, that is, the ministers of the churches of 1 Ephesus, 8 Smyrna, 12 Pergamos, 18 Thyatira : and what is commanded, or found wanting in them.

UNTO the angel of the church of Ephesus write ; These things saith he that holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks ;

Christ the Lord holds His ministers fast ; they may rely on His protection. Apart from Him what light or strength have they ? We may be well content to be in our Lord's hand ; He will sustain us in life or death, if we desire to be His. Further, He walks in the midst of Christians ; He beholds the evil and the good ; He watches grace reviving ; He approves of our efforts to serve Him. In our prayers and Communions His invisible Presence brings us blessings ; we should remember that He is by.

2. I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil : and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars :

Here are examples for us. Christians at Ephesus worked hard and suffered patiently, and knew how to discern evil from good. When they met with false doctrine and sinful deeds they abhorred them. God grant us such patience of affliction and impatience of evil. They could not bear to listen to ill words, or look on ill deeds. This lesson should be taken to heart in these days when we so easily put up with, or even applaud, what is wrong.

3. And hast borne, and hast patience, and for my name's sake hast laboured, and hast not fainted.

Bearing for Christ's sake and not fainting ; that is a noble character to have. These Christians could not bear evil, though they had to bear much else ; they laboured and yet were not wearied out. Christ the Lord noticed and praised what they did for His sake. Alas, how different is all this from my condition ! I suffer myself to be

“Wearied out with half a life,
Scared with this smooth unbloody strife” !

4. Nevertheless I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first love.

This reproof comes home. Once we felt love for Christ ; God's service seemed delightful, the world contemptible. But now we are content with a lower standard. If even in apostolic times and days of persecution Christians grew cold, how much more are we liable to such blame ? Sometimes we have gone gradually backward and yet known it not. In this verse our best of Friends seeks to warn us.

5. Remember therefore from whence thou art fallen, and repent, and do the first works ; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will remove thy candlestick out of his place, except thou repent.

Remember (1) the peace and joy of your former state. Was it not better to put your heart into prayer, to love God and care for souls ? God did great things for you, and yet you lightly forget them. (2) The danger of your present state. When love has grown cold all else may be removed. How can you stand in the day of trial upon mere good character and patience ? Take care that your coldness of heart does not provoke the gracious God to withdraw His hand, which has sustained you so far.

6. But this thou hast, that thou hatest the deeds of the Nicolaitanes, which I also hate.

We may hate deeds and yet love and pity the doers. Indeed, it is clear that God does hate evil deeds ; uncleanness and lying and cheating are wrong, and bring judgment. Unless there is in us some wholesome indignation against evil we cannot have a hearty love for God. Christ approves in these Christians their abhorrence of evil ; it was one grace which they still retained. O Lord, waken in me an impatience of evil ; too long I have paltered with it and consented to it in my heart. May I see it as Thou seest it, vile, foul, and deadly.

7. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the midst of the paradise of God.

This gracious promise to the conqueror expresses infinite joy and comfort. Once the Tree of Life was forbidden to man ; but now the Fall is done away, and Christ opens the door of Paradise to His faithful soldiers. The pain of fighting and wounds will soon be forgotten when we partake of heavenly joy. We have, by God's mercy, some foretastes of it here on earth, but the full enjoyment is for a better place than this.

8. And unto the angel of the church in Smyrna write ; These things saith the first and the last, which was dead, and is alive ;

Christ the Lord has Himself known death ; He bids us not be afraid of it, when we remember that He is immortal, and has immortality for His servants too. Whatever of strange or unknown awaits us in that hour of our dissolution Christ has known ; He holds our hand then. Death was for Him but a brief passage from one scene to another ; He preserved His identity through it. I am grateful, dear Lord, for this word of encouragement. When I look on death it sometimes appears awful, but I do not lose my trust in Thee.

9. *I know thy works, and tribulation, and poverty, (but thou art rich) and I know the blasphemy of them which say they are Jews, and are not, but are the synagogue of Satan.*

Here is a rich and glorious Friend standing by the poor, a mighty Helper at hand for those who seemed in the power of their enemies, true wealth possessed by the destitute ; and, on the other hand, those who loudly professed themselves God's people, and yet were followers of Satan. O strange contrasts which the eye of faith beholds ! How many seem rich, and yet are poor in all good gifts ; how many make great professions, and yet God knows them not !

10. *Fear none of those things which thou shalt suffer : behold, the devil shall cast some of you into prison, that ye may be tried ; and ye shall have tribulation ten days : be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

Imprisonment and ill-usage and threats of worse were no light trial. God does not conceal sorrows from us ; He does not tempt us to serve Him by saying that all shall be smooth. Yet after all, this trial will not last long. Soon we shall look back on it from a land of peace, and marvel that it seemed so terrible. Here there may be enemies all round up to the last moment of life, but the Lord will meet us with a gracious countenance as we come up from the dark river. His reward will be an ample recompense for all that we have suffered.

11. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; He that overcometh shall not be hurt of the second death.*

This gracious promise to the conqueror tells us of a life with no death. One death separates soul from body, but that is of no great account to Christ's servants. Another death is worse, which separates soul and body alike from God. It is worth while for us to endure bravely now, in order to enjoy eternal life hereafter. The first death is but God's messenger sent to recall our soul. We need not fear him ; though he comes with a grim aspect he is but

a friend. But the second death is utter woe and loss, and a final choice of evil. God keep us from it.

12. *And to the angel of the church in Pergamos write; These things saith he which hath the sharp sword with two edges;*

Christ the Lord speaks words which search our hearts ; they pierce deep and bring contrition ; they make us feel that He knows all our secret thoughts. Lord, may we learn to wield this same sword against Thy enemies ; may we be able to overcome sin and unbelief by a right use of Thy holy Word. We must go to Thee for the understanding of it.

13. *I know thy works, and where thou dwellest, even where Satan's seat is: and thou holdest fast my name, and hast not denied my faith, even in those days wherein Antipas was my faithful martyr, who was slain among you, where Satan dwelleth.*

Even where Satan seems to reign the Lord is present. He knows what goes on there, and praises the testimony which His faithful servants bear amidst all discouragements. There are many situations now where Satan and his ministers triumph, and Christ's dear friends and witnesses meet only scorn or worse usage still ; yet He counts their tears, He approves their stedfastness. Before long Satan's glory will all be overthrown.

14. *But I have a few things against thee, because thou hast there them that hold the doctrine of Balaam, who taught Balac to cast a stumblingblock before the children of Israel, to eat things sacrificed unto idols, and to commit fornication. 15. So hast thou also them that hold the doctrine of the Nicolaitanes, which thing I hate.*

Christians were tempted by seeming friendly persuasions to join in the idol feasts, and to tolerate the impurity which went on there. In old times, when Balaam could not prevail against Israel in any other way, he suggested to Balak that he should overthrow them by inducing them to commit uncleanness and worship idols ; and indeed he dealt them a terrible blow in that way (Numbers xxv.). So Christians who resisted open persecution have been overcome by seeming friendliness. We must seek grace to resist enticing words as well as blasphemies ; Satan has many means of approach.

16. *Repent; or else I will come unto thee quickly, and will fight against them with the sword of my mouth.*

There is a communion between Christians ; we are affected by one

another's sins and sorrows. We should grieve for those who fall into deadly sin, endeavour to recover them, learn our own frailty thereby. If we loved God more, they might have learned to do better. God keep us from a selfish isolation of heart which shuts itself up, and lets others sin and suffer without caring.

17. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches ; To him that overcometh will I give to eat of the hidden manna, and will give him a white stone, and in the stone a new name written, which no man knoweth saving he that receiveth it.

This gracious promise to the conqueror, of the hidden manna and the bright shining stone and the new mysterious name, signifies a fulness of Divine knowledge. God gives some revelation of Himself to us in this life, but promises one day something far brighter and deeper and fuller. Our friends who scoff at religion have no notion what true religion is. It is intimate communion with the Source of all Light ; it is a peace and joy and strength which only those who know it can describe. We do not envy this world's gifts when we have God for our Friend. His light is brightness beyond words.

18. And unto the angel of the church in Thyatira write ; These things saith the Son of God, who hath his eyes like unto a flame of fire, and his feet are like fine brass ;

Christ the Lord has knowledge, and power also. His enemies prove feeble before His Divine glory when He comes forth to judge. Indeed, for a while He allows Himself to be despised by men, even though He is Almighty. He,

“ The Omnipotent and dread,
On high in humblest patience dwells.”

19. I know thy works, and charity, and service, and faith, and thy patience, and thy works ; and the last to be more than the first.

Here is praise worth having : to have works to show, inward charity, outward service, true faith, unwearied patience, and above all, to be growing in goodness. Ah ! I should be happy if this could be said of me. When will it be true that I advance towards heaven ; that my prayers, my love, my duty improve day by day ? How shall I ever reach perfection if my progress is so imperceptible ?

20. Notwithstanding I have a few things against thee, because thou sufferest that woman Jezebel, which calleth herself a prophetess, to teach and to seduce my servants to commit forni-

cation, and to eat things sacrificed unto idols. 21. And I gave her space to repent of her fornication; and she repented not.

Queen Jezebel, Ahab's wife, is remembered for her wickedness. She brought in a hateful idolatry, tried to exterminate the worship of the true God from among His people, and stirred up her husband to evil deeds. So in this city there was some woman who led Christians away from their Saviour. As God has given women such great gifts of love and patience, such wings of devotion to rise upwards, so He has suffered them to be more easily led astray; they have become the prey of delusions which they fancied were Divine revelations; they have used their great gifts to drag men's souls down.

22. Behold, I will cast her into a bed, and them that commit adultery with her into great tribulation, except they repent of their deeds. 23. And I will kill her children with death; and all the churches shall know that I am he which searcheth the reins and hearts: and I will give unto every one of you according to your works.

God's mercy sends trouble upon sinners; pain and tribulation are His messengers to make us repent. But if we do not heed these warnings, worse may come upon us; trouble and loss without remedy. God will be glorified either by us or upon us; unless we submit in penitence to His chastening hand, we shall but serve as examples of His wrath. O Lord, let it be rather in this life, and according to Thy mercy, that I am punished, than in the life to come, and according to my own deserving.

24. But unto you I say, and unto the rest in Thyatira, as many as have not this doctrine, and which have not known the depths of Satan, as they speak; I will put upon you none other burden.

What a difference there is between "the deep things of God" and "the depths of Satan" here mentioned! The former are revealed to faith and humility, the latter are explored by the daring presumptuous will that seeks to enjoy evil without fear. Let us be content with the knowledge of good, and not rashly seek to know evil as well. It is enough to bear Christ's burden and enjoy what light He is pleased to give.

25. But that which ye have already hold fast till I come.

Keep to the old truths, they will be enough for this life. Keep to the old prayers. Do not lay aside religious ways, communions, intercessions; indeed, they might well be deeper and fuller, but yet

cling to them. If patience and faith have been yours, even though in small measure, let them remain in spite of perplexities. Soon Christ the Lord will appear to solve all riddles, and end all conflicts.

26. And he that overcometh, and keepeth my works unto the end, to him will I give power over the nations : 27. and he shall rule them with a rod of iron ; as the vessels of a potter shall they be broken to shivers : even as I received of my Father.

This power, this firmness of mind, this unshaken courage that overcomes all obstacles, is the recompense of those who faithfully serve God. I, alas ! do not deserve it ; my fondness for sin, my sloth and weakness, have lost me this promise. Jesus Himself went the straight road without turning, and His saints after their measure follow Him ; but I am so changeable and frail that I am overcome by the least obstacle. It was not thus that true Christians overcame the world.

28. And I will give him the morning star. 29. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

This gracious promise reminds us that this world's light is but a dim lamp compared to the dazzling star of the life to come. Indeed, Jesus Christ Himself is "the bright and morning star ;" His radiance illumines hearts, His grace shews the path ; He is our true Way, and His words guide us. After a stormy night we welcome the morning star which tells us of the approaching day ; so, amidst this dark and cloudy time we rejoice in Christ's brightness, and look forward to the day when His full glory will be manifested.

CHAPTER III.

2. The angel of the Church of Sardis is reproved, 3. exhorted to repent, and threatened if he do not repent. 8. The angel of the church of Philadelphia ro. is approved for his diligence and patience. 15. The angel of Laodicea rebuked, for being neither hot nor cold, 19. and admonished to be more zealous. 20. Christ standeth at the door and knocketh.

A ND unto the angel of the church in Sardis write ; These things saith he that hath the seven Spirits of God, and the seven stars ; I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead.

Christ the Lord is the Giver of all gifts, the Source of all power. No one can obtain grace except through Him ; no one can enter on any office rightly except He has chosen him. He it is Who speaks this terrible word to Christians who are only such in name. He sees many who are dead in soul while yet they appear to live. O dear friends, beware lest a cold, lifeless heart, foul corruption, utter insensibility, lie hid beneath a decent outside. His all-seeing eye pierces through and discovers what we are ; yet remember that Christ can raise the dead.

2. Be watchful, and strengthen the things which remain, that are ready to die : for I have not found thy works perfect before God.

Here are souls ready to die, yet the good Physician rouses them and points out to them how to live again. Here is great danger, spiritual sloth, utter weakness, works not done, yet there is still something which can answer to the merciful Voice of Christ. There is great mercy as well as severity in such a call. Ah ! whose works can be found perfect ? Certainly not mine. My life draws towards an end, and there is nothing done.

3. Remember therefore how thou hast received and heard, and hold fast, and repent. If therefore thou shalt not watch, I will come on thee as a thief, and thou shalt not know what hour I will come upon thee.

Once we prized Divine truth, once it came with power, was received with love, was the source of all light to us. We should live over in memory those bright days when we gave ourselves to God, and He shewed Himself to us. The remembrance of them will put us to a salutary shame. Christ's judgment is near ; the little space which divides the visible and invisible worlds will soon be past. How can we best prepare for our great change ?

4. Thou hast a few names even in Sardis which have not defiled their garments ; and they shall walk with me in white : for they are worthy.

The Lord graciously recognises and approves all those whom He finds trying to serve Him. He gives them grace, and preserves their purity, and promises them reward. How delightful for those who have striven hard against uncleanness, or have by Divine mercy been washed from it, to enter on a state where all evil will be put away. It is worth while taking pains to cleanse our hearts and bodies from evil now, so as to receive Christ's promises in heaven. Indeed our worthiness is but a gift from God, and depends on His mercy, yet He accepts us for His word's sake.

5. He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white

raiment ; and I will not blot out his name out of the book of life, but I will confess his name before my Father, and before his angels. 6. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

This gracious promise tells us of perfect purity, and of remaining God's for ever, and of being acknowledged by Christ the Lord before heavenly hosts. To attain that we will cheerfully give up the world's splendour, and honour, and applause. It is hard to overcome, yet God helps us to fight. He raises us from our falls, His mercy encourages us to keep on fighting. Perhaps, dear friend, you have had a hard fight, you have fallen, yet risen again, you have often been all but lost, yet the Divine Voice still appeals to you, still tells you of victory to be won. Listen to it and take heart.

7. And to the angel of the church in Philadelphia write ; These things saith he that is holy, he that is true, he that hath the key of David, he that openeth, and no man shutteth ; and shutteth, and no man openeth ;

Christ the Lord knows who are His ; He only is infallible. Many of His true servants have been cast out here below, many false professors exalted highly in His Church, but He alone gives the final sentence. O words of joy for those who have been wrongfully reviled as heretics, or condemned as evildoers ! They may be separated from the Church militant, but the Church triumphant receives them joyfully. Those who use the key of Christ's authority in His Church should bear in mind in all their administration that they must give up the keys soon into the Master's Hands, and account to Him for their use.

8. I know thy works : behold, I have set before thee an open door, and no man can shut it : for thou hast a little strength, and hast kept my word, and hast not denied my name.

I feel my own great weakness and ignorance. I have no eloquence, or power to win souls, yet God has a message here for me. I rely all the more on Him because I can do so little. Let me only come to Him for strength, and hold fast His faith, and I may yet find some work to be done for Him. He opens a door for me into other hearts, into grace, into promises, and bids me enter.

9. Behold, I will make them of the synagogue of Satan, which say they are Jews, and are not, but do lie ; behold, I will make them to come and worship before thy feet, and to know that I have loved thee.

Even bitterest enemies of the gospel should come to feel its truth.

This was indeed a glorious victory, just as in S. Paul's own conversion. Here are Jews acknowledging Christ, honouring His faithful servants, confessing God's Presence in the Christian Church, and all this was done by means of those who had little power, but were patient and stedfast. God blessed their work to the conversion of many.

10. Because thou hast kept the word of my patience, I also will keep thee from the hour of temptation, which shall come upon all the world, to try them that dwell upon the earth.

The gospel is the word of Christ's patience, because it teaches patience, and tells us of Christ's own endurance, and has great promises for those who are patient. I must have patience with myself, with the Church, with the conditions of my life. I must follow my Master and His saints in their patient ways. Who knows how soon some great trial may come? I shall fail in that day unless I have learned beforehand to bear and suffer a while.

11. Behold, I come quickly: hold that fast which thou hast, that no man take thy crown.

This is a word of warning, yet of comfort; neither opportunities nor trials will last very long. Let us but resist boldly, and soon we shall find ourselves safe for ever. Certainly the time is but short in which to get ready for heaven; but yet

"If He come quick, the mightier sure will prove
His Spirit in each heart that timely strives to love."

12. Him that overcometh will I make a pillar in the temple of my God, and he shall go no more out: and I will write upon him the name of my God, and the name of the city of my God, which is new Jerusalem, which cometh down out of heaven from my God: and I will write upon him my new name. 13. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.

This gracious promise speaks of final perseverance. Those who have remained stedfast amidst the shocks and changes of this uncertain world shall at last be safe in that blessed place whence is no falling. There they shall enjoy God's Presence for ever, and shall know the fulness of His mercy. Let us, Lord, be of that company. Write upon us Thy Name, by making us Thy true children in heart and will; and the name of Thy Church triumphant, by making us citizens of it, joined to it by true inward communion; and the Name of Thy dear Son, by giving us a share in His glorified Life. Faithful hearts have longed for that heavenly Temple, that true Jerusalem, that unspeakable knowledge, have dreamt of

it and sung of it, but the reality is beyond all that we can understand in this world.

14. *And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write ; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God ;*

Christ the Lord is a true witness when He speaks of God and Divine grace and our duty. He witnessed by His Life and His Death. All things in nature and grace were made by Him. He designed both worlds, the visible and invisible, with power, love, and wisdom. O blessed Jesus, I adore Thy Godhead, I trust in Thy words, I commit myself into Thy hands, knowing indeed my own frailty, but still that Thou art able to save. If I have to bear witness of Thee, enable me to bear it aright.

15. *I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot : I would thou were cold or hot.*

Alas ! I am not utterly cold, I have sometimes felt God's love, have known something of His truth ; I am not wholly outside the covenant. Perhaps, if I were, Divine things might have a chance of touching me now. Again, I certainly am not hot, I have no zeal to spread God's kingdom, nor thankfulness for His rich mercies, nor fervent charity for His poor members. Nothing about me of a burning heart. Then the All-seeing Eye discerns in me this very character which is here described.

16. *So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth.*

How grave a thing, to cause disgust with God ! He sickens at such a condition in us. He cannot bear it longer. Those who have never known Him He may call by terrors or mercies ; those who are His faithful servants He guides towards heaven ; but what can Omnipotence itself do with one who knows and cares not ? Afflictions, judgments, ordinances, texts, all lose their power. His love and pity fall dull on such a heart. Yet, dear Lord, though I am thus, and these two verses mean me, I desire to be different, I am not settled in a lukewarm condition. I entreat of Thee grace to hate sin and love holiness.

17. *Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing ; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked :*

Let me know my own vileness and misery, my lack of virtues, my spiritual darkness and ignorance. Let the thought of God's excellences sometimes come home to me, and shew by contrast what I myself am. If I feel that I am respectable, devout, sen-

sible, that I have no need to be anxious, that I am free from temptation or danger, then, O Lord, wake me (if it please Thee) by some blow, keep me from the extreme perils of such a comfortable easy state. What, have I treasures of holiness, deep feelings of devotion to rely upon? Let me remember how poor and wretched are the best of these apart from God's constant forgiveness!

18. I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see.

O wise counsel! Here is purest gold to relieve our poverty, whitest raiment to conceal our shame, most healing ointment to give us eyesight again. Here is the best of bargains; no business transaction ever turned out so advantageous as this. We bring a sense of our own need; that is all the price. We have but to distrust ourselves, and renounce our own merits, and then the Lord gives us in exchange for this such a wealth of grace and mercy. Is it not worth while? Do any of God's true servants repent of their dealings with Him?

19. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent.

Blessed be God, Who is pleased to awaken us from our slumber by salutary affliction. He rebukes and chastens His dearest children. Shall we then complain if we are taken into the number of those who suffer? Christ the Lord has much yet to do with us before we are fit for heaven. His mercy can turn all ills, pain, and loss, and low spirits, and everything that is sad and grievous, into a remedy of grace.

20. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.

He knocks many ways, by warnings, by means, by teachings. He is not soon wearied out of appealing to our hearts. Those are happy who recognise the friendly Voice and Hand, and invite the Saviour of men to take up His abode within. How often He has knocked at my door and I have not heeded. He comes to enrich me with His love, He offers all possible joy and peace; those who welcome Him will find exceeding happiness. What a woful thing it would be to have kept the door of our hearts fast shut and defied all the efforts of redeeming mercy to open it.

21. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in

my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne.

This gracious promise tells us of Divine peace ; after the working day is over God offers us repose with Him. Christ the Lord Himself bore and suffered, and was plunged in trouble and strife, but afterwards He entered on His glory, and His soldiers have the same experience. No sin or enemy can disturb the rest of heaven. If we despond for our own unworthiness, Christ encourages us by recalling the price He paid for our souls. What a change is here indicated ! persons who are miserable, and poor and blind and naked, may yet be exalted to a share in Christ's glory.

• 22. *He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches.*

Seven times over have I heard this warning. I have seen in the condition of these Christian Churches various states of Christian life represented. I have read of their dangers, trials, shortcomings. Seven glorious promises have been made to the conqueror. May I lay to heart these seven Epistles which Christ glorified has thus inspired for my instruction. As He used, in the days of His Humiliation, to teach us many things, so He continues from heaven to instruct us by His Holy Spirit.

CHAPTER IV.

2. John seeth the throne of God in heaven. 4. The four and twenty elders.
6. The four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 10. The elders lay down their crowns, and worship him that sat on the throne.

AFTER this I looked, and, behold, a door was opened in heaven : and the first voice which I heard was as it were of a trumpet talking with me ; which said, Come up hither, and I will shew thee things which must be hereafter.

The gospel opens the door of heaven to believers' eyes, reveals a heavenly message to their ears. Let us humbly and earnestly look in at this door and listen to this voice. If all is not yet clear, still we shall see great sights and hear awful voices, enough to fill us with adoration. This door is shut fast, and this voice is quite dumb to those who approach God's mysteries in a careless, self-satisfied spirit. When we kneel down with a devout heart God opens a door to us for our thoughts and hopes to pass in, and for His truth to come out to our unspeakable comfort.

2. And immediately I was in the spirit : and, behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne.

Faith beholds the Eternal God. Human eyes cannot reach so far, but the gospel shews us God sitting on His Throne, ordering all things, Himself ever the same. He beholds our hearts, guides our life, allows us to call Him by the gracious name of Father. Earthly things and all their splendour soon pass away, but God remains unchangeable, the strength of all those that call on Him.

3. And he that sat was to look upon like a jasper and a sardine stone: and there was a rainbow round about the throne, in sight like unto an emerald.

God's holiness, power, and mercy are represented by those various gleams of brightness. We cannot know Him fully as He is, nor approach Him at all except through Jesus Christ. But what a stay to the mind to remember His overshadowing love ! When the great wonders of nature or the subtleties of genius seem to conceal God from us, we must turn to our prayers, and remember that the Divine glory is as bright as ever, even though it is hidden from us for a while by some cloud.

4. And round about the throne were four and twenty seats: and upon the seats I saw four and twenty elders sitting, clothed in white raiment; and they had on their heads crowns of gold.

Faith beholds in heaven men like ourselves, saints from the Old Testament and from the New ; they were originally weak and sinful as we are, but now they are at rest and enjoy God's Presence ; they always love God, are quite pure from sin, have won an unending victory. What an encouragement for us to do our best when we see what rewards God has for His saints !

5. And out of the throne proceeded lightnings and thunderings and voices: and there were seven lamps of fire burning before the throne, which are the seven Spirits of God.

Faith beholds the gifts and graces of God proceeding from His Throne. The Holy Spirit comes forth with His sevensfold gifts to enlighten, comfort, and cheer His servants. When my heart grows cold let me seek a new warmth from that Divine Fire which never goes out. However poor and dull our hearts, scanty our worshippers, faint our praises, yet we can unite this poor service of ours to a better worship above.

6. And before the throne there was a sea of glass like unto crystal: and in the midst of the throne, and round about the throne, were four beasts full of eyes before and behind. 7. And the first beast was like a lion, and the second beast like a calf, and the third beast had a face as a man, and the fourth beast was like a flying eagle.

Here we are tossed on the waves of this troublesome world, but in God's sight all is clear, all peaceful. His counsels are too deep for us to discern ; we live amidst great depths of wisdom not wholly declared as yet, but He sees the beginning and the end of all. Before Him all orders of creatures bear their part in worship. These wonderful figures, which recall the fierce lion and the labouring ox, and man with his higher gifts, and the birds that soar upwards, tell us that all creation belongs to God. He designed all orders of being, imparts their life, directs their ways, and if we are His nothing can hurt us.

8. And the four beasts had each of them six wings about him ; and they were full of eyes within : and they rest not day and night, saying, Holy, holy, holy, Lord God Almighty, which was, and is, and is to come.

Creation never sleeps, it always sets forth God's praise and obeys His Will. To the listening ear heaven and earth declare God's glory ; they tell of a Supreme Wisdom, Power, and Love that guides them. Oh for an ear to hear that Voice and a heart to join in it ! When we rise from our beds it should be our delight to worship and praise our God, happiest of all when we can kneel before His Altar and shew forth there the true sacrifice of praise and thanksgiving which the Church celebrates.

9. And when those beasts give glory and honour and thanks to him that sat on the throne, who liveth for ever and ever,

When that is so ; indeed it is at any moment for us. There is no hour at which our hymns may not rise up in union with the worship of heaven. Why should we alone remain dumb when saints and creatures praise God ? Why do we let our strife and evil thoughts spoil our praises ? If we are willing to give God the glory which is His due, He will give us peace and happiness in holy obedience.

10. The four and twenty elders fall down before him that sat on the throne, and worship him that liveth for ever and ever, and cast their crowns before the throne, saying, I I. thou art worthy, O Lord, to receive glory and honour and power : for thou hast created all things, and for thy pleasure they are and were created.

Saints glorified are most humble in their adoration, they fall prostrate before God's Throne. Shame on us who lounge over our prayers, or sing hymns with wandering looks and mind. They ascribe all good that there has been in them to God only ; their crowns belong to Him, He only is worthy. Shame on us who love praise so much and lay ourselves out to get flattered. They

recall His mercies in nature and grace, wondering at His great goodness Who has so bountifully provided for them. Shame on us who are so complaining, and forget God's love, His power, His constant mercy, and complain of our own condition. May the vision of this chapter enlarge our hearts.

CHAPTER V.

1. ***The book sealed with seven seals : 9. which only the Lamb that was slain is worthy to open. 12. Therefore the elders praise him, 9. and confess that he redeemed them with his blood.***

AND I saw in the right hand of him that sat on the throne a book written within and on the backside, sealed with seven seals.

O Lord, I know that Thy counsels are sure ; all things are ordered by Thy Divine wisdom. This thought sustains me in hours of darkness. This roll written within and without is the full explanation of Thy government, but it is concealed from me as yet ; I cannot open it, nor read what is written there. Give me a reverent submission, and a firm trust that one day all will be made plain.

2. ***And I saw a strong angel proclaiming with a loud voice, Who is worthy to open the book, and to loose the seals thereof ?***
3. ***And no man in heaven, nor in earth, neither under the earth, was able to open the book, neither to look thereon.***

No one could solve the riddle of the painful earth, nor declare God's Will with authority, nor shew us the plan of life clearly marked out. Darkness hung over earth and heaven, and neither prophet nor angel could roll it away. These words describe to us the unsuccessful attempts of man to understand God's ways before Christ came ; many attempted to explain them, but in vain.

4. ***And I wept much, because no man was found worthy to open and to read the book, neither to look thereon.***

These tears are the tears of one who knows God is righteous, and His ways just, and His saints in the right path, and yet cannot reconcile all this with facts as they are in the world. Many strong souls have shed such tears, longing vainly for an explanation of what seemed difficult. Most people are accustomed to grieve over pain or losses, but it is a deeper grief still to feel our own ignorance and the great mysteries which surround us. Who can give us light upon the counsels of God ?

5. And one of the elders saith unto me, Weep not : behold, the Lion of the tribe of Juda, the Root of David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

One there is Who is God and man too, Who unites a human nature and life in this world with the unseen Eternal Godhead. He conquered sin and death ; His victory encourages us to wait in patience the full unfolding of God's counsels. Bear patiently the great mysteries which oppress you, for the Lord Jesus tells you of God's love and a life beyond the grave. He does not yet a while unroll the book or explain to you all that is in it, but He encourages you to be patient.

6. And I beheld, and, lo, in the midst of the throne and of the four beasts, and in the midst of the elders, stood a Lamb as it had been slain, having seven horns and seven eyes, which are the seven Spirits of God sent forth into all the earth.

Christ the Lord retains the marks of the Cross. His Divine power and knowledge, His quickening all the Church with spiritual life, His position in the midst of heavenly glory, do not make Him forget the Death which He suffered for us. When we approach the Altar and remember Christ's Death in the way He appointed, we present before God's Throne the Lamb slain for us, and by faith share in the benefits of that Sacrifice.

7. And he came and took the book out of the right hand of him that sat upon the throne.

All things are committed into my Saviour's hands. He dispenses God's mercy, He knows whose names are in the Book of Life, He gives counsels of Divine wisdom. What He pleases to reveal I receive gratefully, what He keeps secret I adore reverently. How marvellous it is that a Man from among men, the Son of Mary, Who has known our sorrows, should be also our Lord and God !

8. And when he had taken the book, the four beasts and four and twenty elders fell down before the Lamb, having every one of them harps, and golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of saints.

Praise and prayer go on in heaven ; praise for what God has already done, for those who are at rest and have conquered ; prayer for those who are still contending against temptation. Our praises too are heard, and our prayers welcomed there ; we join with "all the company of heaven" in our worship. Oh that we might shew something of the reverence, the heartiness, the unanimity which prevail there ! Those sweet odours that mounted up before God's throne were composed of the tears, the entreaties, the intercessions of people like ourselves.

Here is Conquest on his triumphant march. What seems obscure or wrong in the issue of a war is all ordered by God's Providence. The great victors of the earth are His ministers ; His Divine kingdom overrules all others. When we witness great wars or read of victories, we should adore God's wisdom Who pulls down or sets up. But remember, the only lasting victory is that which Divine grace wins over the sinner. When all this world's conquerors are dust and the name of their victories forgotten, there will be praises still for those who have conquered self and temptation.

3. And when he had opened the second seal, I heard the second beast say, Come and see. 4. And there went out another horse that was red : and power was given to him that sat thereon to take peace from the earth, and that they should kill one another : and there was given unto him a great sword.

Here is Civil War ; his blood-red horse and mighty sword express the misery of strife and bloodshed. Those Christians who have lived in such times learnt to prize heavenly things by the very insecurity of peace and property and life. They bowed down in reverence to God's order, and found true peace even amidst the disorder of all things around them. God in His mercy has bestowed quieter days on us, knowing our weakness.

5. And when he had opened the third seal, I heard the third beast say, Come and see. And I beheld, and lo a black horse ; and he that sat on him had a pair of balances in his hand. 6. And I heard a voice in the midst of the four beasts say, A measure of wheat for a penny, and three measures of barley for a penny ; and see thou hurt not the oil and the wine.

Here is Famine, doling out bread by weight, yet still leaving a bare subsistence for mankind. It is not chance that rules the seasons and inflicts scarcity of God's natural gifts ; rather fate sees God's judgments on our thanklessness. Many of our poorer brethren suffer frequent scarcity of all things, while we are preserved from it. God give us tender hearts to seek into their wants and supply them as far as we can. Let us not forget to pray daily for all things needful both for our souls and bodies.

7. And when he had opened the fourth seal, I heard the voice of the fourth beast say, Come and see. 8. And I looked, and behold a pale horse : and his name that sat on him was Death, and Hell followed with him. And power was given unto them over the fourth part of the earth, to kill with sword, and with hunger, and with death, and with the beasts of the earth.

Here is Mortality, terrible with pallid faces and decaying bodies. The gloomy reign of death is ever near us ; at times it strikes on our sight in great visible plagues or disasters, which pile the earth with dead. Yet death is but God's messenger, sent out to gather in souls for Him. We can cheerfully submit ourselves to death, in whatever form he approaches us, praying only that the end of our life may be such as to further God's glory and our own salvation. Bear in mind that death often comes up at a gallop, overtakes us suddenly ; we must not be unprepared.

9. *And when he had opened the fifth seal, I saw under the altar the souls of them that were slain for the word of God, and for the testimony which they held :*

Here is Persecution, when God's faithful servants have to give up their very life sooner than offend Him. Alas ! how strange it is that God should allow those who love Him best to suffer worst. Their tears, their anguish, their blood, were the sacrifice that they made to God. They were reviled and tortured by men, but God held their hand ; His love did not forsake them at such a moment. Theirs was true loyalty, that clung to Christ even at the cost of life. Their souls are safe in God's keeping now.

10. *And they cried with a loud voice, saying, How long, O Lord, holy and true, dost thou not judge and avenge our blood on them that dwell on the earth ?*

Not that saints in Paradise desire vengeance ; their own prayer for their persecutors is always, "Lord, lay not this sin to their charge ;" but the unrighteousness which they suffered demands punishment. They were unjustly dealt with, and they demand a righteous Judge to vindicate their cause. They were martyred by earthly judges, but they cry out for a heavenly King to bring in true justice. God's justice demands that all cruelty and oppression should find a fit punishment. Who will not tremble at the remembrance of all the wrong that cries out for redress ? Let us not add to it.

11. *And white robes were given unto every one of them ; and it was said unto them, that they should rest yet for a little season, until their fellowservants also and their brethren, that should be killed as they were, should be fulfilled.*

What peace there is in that place, what prayers and praises are offered there ! There disembodied souls rest a while, waiting the full manifestation of God's designs. When we approach God's Altar we remember those who have departed this life in His faith and fear, we join with them in pleading the One Sacrifice, by which the whole Church shares in the benefits of Christ's Passion.

12. And I beheld when he had opened the sixth seal, and, lo, there was a great earthquake ; and the sun became black as sackcloth of hair, and the moon became as blood ; 13. and the stars of heaven fell unto the earth, even as a fig tree casteth her untimely figs, when she is shaken of a mighty wind. 14. And the heaven departed as a scroll when it is rolled together ; and every mountain and island were moved out of their places.

Here are earthquakes, but yet the trembling of the earth extends to heaven also, and all things, great and small, suffer some terrible ruin which upsets their wonted course. Lord, if it be Thy Will that as the earth waxes old the convulsions of nature become more terrible, and all that we put most trust in gives way, be Thou our Refuge in such times. The true Heaven will never be moved. God's glory and providence remain quite fixed and sure, whatever ups and downs come here below. God is our Sun that goes not down, our strong Rock, our sure Resting-place.

15. And the kings of the earth, and the great men, and the rich men, and the chief captains, and the mighty men, and every bondman, and every free man, hid themselves in the dens and in the rocks of the mountains ;

Fear and death make all men equal. Common people tremble before the rich and mighty ones of the earth now ; we see how the poor and the slave have to give way, how pride and wealth tyrannise, how human pomp is coveted and adored daily, but in a very little while all this grandeur will be annihilated. When danger comes, and when we have to die, only God appears great then.

16. And said to the mountains and rocks, Fall on us, and hide us from the face of him that sitteth on the throne, and from the wrath of the Lamb : 17. for the great day of his wrath is come ; and who shall be able to stand ?

Let us approach the Lamb of God in the time of His mercy, before His awful judgments draw near. His Wounds are our hiding-place. We plead all His Sufferings and Death endured for us, and set this between our sins and God's holiness. It will be too late to cry for mercy when the time of vengeance comes, when impenitent sinners will reap the fruits of their doings. Either the Face of God will be revealed to us as the Face of a merciful Friend, long served and loved, or we shall turn from it in horror when its awful rays strike upon us.

CHAPTER VII.

3. An angel sealeth the servants of God in their foreheads. 4. The number of them that were sealed: of the tribes of Israel a certain number. 9. Of all other nations an innumerable multitude, which stand before the throne, clad in white robes, and palms in their hands. 14. Their robes were washed in the blood of the Lamb.

AND after these things I saw four angels standing on the four corners of the earth, holding the four winds of the earth, that the wind should not blow on the earth, nor on the sea, nor on any tree.

Amidst God's judgments He remembers mercy. His unseen armies are round us, and protect those who trust in Him. Help us, Lord, to recognise Thy secret work of grace no less than Thy visible judgments. We do not indeed see with literal eyes the angels holding back the storm, but we find God mercifully withholding calamity, waiting till we are able to bear it. He gives us calm, quiet days before the storm of trouble blows again.

2. And I saw another angel ascending from the east, having the seal of the living God: and he cried with a loud voice to the four angels, to whom it was given to hurt the earth and the sea, 3. saying, Hurt not the earth, neither the sea, nor the trees, till we have sealed the servants of our God in their foreheads.

God knows His servants, and orders all things for their salvation. He imprints on their hearts an abiding peace, on their very brows a calm and steadfast look, when all around is giving way. These verses refer to days of great misery, and tell us how true believers were to be preserved in such a time. Christ the Lord had printed His Cross upon them, and they kept safe this holy sign; it was their strength and comfort whatever came. We also have been made His in many sacred hours. Once we vowed

" To count all earthly gain but loss,
All earthly honour shame,
And we were strengthened with the Cross
That we might bear the same."

4. And I heard the number of them which were sealed: and there were sealed an hundred and forty and four thousand of all the tribes of the children of Israel. 5. Of the tribe of Juda were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Reuben were sealed

twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Gad were sealed twelve thousand. 6. Of the tribe of Aser were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Neptahlim were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Manasses were sealed twelve thousand. 7. Of the tribe of Simeon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Levi were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Issachar were sealed twelve thousand. 8. Of the tribe of Zabulon were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Joseph were sealed twelve thousand. Of the tribe of Benjamin were sealed twelve thousand.

The Jews had crucified Christ the Lord and persecuted His saints, terrible judgments were hanging over their heads, and yet here is a great company out of all the tribes of Israel sealed as God's true servants, and so preserved free from harm. It is not that literally twelve thousand from each tribe should be thus selected, but that a complete and perfect number should be made up from all Israel. Lord, we are Thy spiritual Israel, we have a better covenant, enjoy better promises, have come into the place of Thy ancient people; may we be faithful to our holy calling, and feel in our hearts some tokens of Thy saving grace. Let no sin blot out Thy sign which was once marked upon us.

9. After this I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands;

In the last chapter we looked upon the earth and saw terrible judgments approaching, and the chapter next after this discloses them still more fully. But here we look behind the veil and see God's people after they have passed through all the troubles of this sad world. What a contrast to things here! There saints stand upright, with no more danger of falling; there white robes are quite pure and bright; there endless festival is kept; there Christ's Face is seen by His people. While all things grow darker here below, we can find comfort in remembering what is going on in a better place than this.

10. And cried with a loud voice, saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb.

It is all His, not our doing. He alone makes saints out of sinners, inhabitants of heaven out of frail earthly clay. The thought of past dangers makes the mercy of God in our salvation seem the greater. May we, while still on earth, share in this heavenly spirit of gratitude. May pride, self-confidence, and self-righteous-

ness disappear. It is the temper of heaven to ascribe all glory to God, and feel what He has done for us.

11. And all the angels stood round about the throne, and about the elders and the four beasts, and fell before the throne on their faces, and worshipped God, 12. saying, Amen : Blessing, and glory, and wisdom, and thanksgiving, and honour, and power, and might, be unto our God for ever and ever. Amen.

The holy angels stand in a blessed obedience and order ; they worship with deepest reverence, they praise with fervent devotion, they rejoice in the salvation bestowed on man, they recognise the power of Divine grace. In this angelic choir we see what our behaviour ought to be, our irreverence and coldness are rebuked.

13. And one of the elders answered, saying unto me, What are these which are arrayed in white robes ? and whence came they ?

We are led by this question to compare the condition of God's saints in glory with what they were on earth. Now they are at rest, in light and peace ; now they look back on all their sorrows and fears as done with. Once they, too, were tempted, afflicted, despised ; they were frail mortals beset by fightings without and fears within.

14. And I said unto him, Sir, thou knowest. And he said to me, These are they which came out of great tribulation, and have washed their robes, and made them white in the blood of the Lamb.

All the blessed have known suffering, all have been cleansed by Christ's Blood ; they bore a cross themselves, but it was the saving Cross of Christ that atoned for their sins. Observe these two rules of God's kingdom ; we must learn to be patient if we would enter there, and also we must recur to a love and purity greater than our own if we would be made fit for God's Presence. Our sufferings help to prepare us for heaven, but they would not avail unless Christ had suffered for us.

15. Therefore are they before the throne of God, and serve him day and night in his temple : and he that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them.

Here is God's Temple, a better one than earth ever knew. How glorious the worship that goes on there ! What a Priest, what a choir, what a congregation ! The more we love God's service here below, the more ready we shall become for the service that is

offered above. He is present among us now, though unseen, and claims the same reverence and love.

16. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. 17. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes.

Here is God's home, a safe rest after the journey is over. His sheep find pasture here, His afflicted ones find comfort, His travellers find rest. Remember that God is infinitely good; He knows our needs, He has prepared for us more than we can ask or think. In the thought of such a blessed vision as this chapter unfolds our cares and trials on earth all seem less important.

CHAPTER VIII.

1. At the opening of the seventh seal, 2. seven angels had seven trumpets given them. 6. Four of them sound their trumpets, and great plagues follow. 3. Another angel putteth incense to the prayers of the saints on the golden altar.

*A*ND when he had opened the seventh seal, there was silence in heaven about the space of half an hour.

Now the seven seals are all opened, but the book of God's counsels is not read to us. Much has been shewn us, but in this life we cannot hear the whole. Be content to wait for light. God waits, the saints and angels wait, the completion of all things will come speedily; it is but a little while and all will be plain. Remember also to make times for silence, opportunities when all this world's stir may be hushed, and we may reflect in quietness on what God would have us do.

2. And I saw the seven angels which stood before God; and to them were given seven trumpets.

These seven angels with their trumpets remind us of the great victory won by Joshua on his entry into the promised land, when he took Jericho. There seven priests went before the Ark blowing trumpets, and on the seventh day the wall fell down prostrate before them, and the city was taken. The weapons of saints seem powerless, and the powers of this world infinitely great and lasting, yet the ruin of all this grandeur is preparing. God's unseen host are encompassing it round ready to overthrow it.

3. And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer ; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne. 4. And the smoke of the incense, which came with the prayers of the saints, ascended up before God out of the angel's hand.

Prayers are not lost ; they ascend before God ; they are an offering precious in His sight ; a time comes when they obtain an answer. Indeed we do not need angels to present them, but yet it is strength to us to remember that all the company of heaven join with us in our worship ; they share in our longings, in our praises, in our intercessions. All God's servants in earth and heaven make up one great congregation who worship together. Let our prayers be reverent and earnest, as befits us who are fellow-worshippers with God's holy angels.

5. And the angel took the censer, and filled it with fire of the altar, and cast it into the earth : and there were voices, and thunderings, and lightnings, and an earthquake.

As the prayers were heard before God, so their effect followed upon the earth. How strange it is that so much can be done by prayer ! God hears the cry of a true heart, He stores up the anguish, the pleadings, the earnest desires of His servants. What though He bear long with them, yet He is preparing an answer. We must not let our faithless hearts give over praying.

6. And the seven angels which had the seven trumpets prepared themselves to sound.

Great Jericho stands in all its majesty, strong in this world's defences, laughing at God's kingdom. Meanwhile, in realms above, the ministers of His vengeance prepare for that blast which will bring down all that glory into ruin. Contrast the passing splendour of this world with the unseen realities of God's kingdom. Before long all the former will have crumbled into dust. Shall we be found among the guilty then, or with God's victorious host ?

7. The first angel sounded, and there followed hail and fire mingled with blood, and they were cast upon the earth : and the third part of trees was burnt up, and all green grass was burnt up.

Earth begins to suffer : "seed-time and harvest, summer and winter" no longer bring their accustomed mercies. The great Earth, our mother, on whose bosom we live, no longer nourishes her children.

When such bad seasons and distress come, may our thoughts be uplifted to

“A tenderer bower,
A more resplendent home.”

8. And the second angel sounded, and as it were a great mountain burning with fire was cast into the sea: and the third part of the sea became blood; 9. and the third part of the creatures which were in the sea, and had life, died; and the third part of the ships were destroyed.

The sea begins to suffer: its harvest of fish, its wealth of traffic, decay. Yet when those days come, God's servants profit by their losses; if they keep His grace and a hope of heaven, they are rich enough; they survey with a quiet mind the great changes that come.

10. And the third angel sounded, and there fell a great star from heaven, burning as it were a lamp, and it fell upon the third part of the rivers, and upon the fountains of waters; 11. and the name of the star is called Wormwood: and the third part of the waters became wormwood; and many men died of the waters, because they were made bitter.

The rivers begin to suffer: disease spreads from the unwholesome water; yet there is still “a river, the streams whereof make glad the city of God.” The living water of God's truth is not wholly cut off. May we ever drink from it and find refreshment. Grant us, Lord, to receive it pure and undefiled.

12. And the fourth angel sounded, and the third part of the sun was smitten, and the third part of the moon, and the third part of the stars; so as the third part of them was darkened, and the day shone not for a third part of it, and the night likewise.

The sky begins to suffer, and the heavenly bodies no longer give their wonted light. But, come what may, Christ, our true Sun, still shines in heaven; our moon, which is the Church, reflects His splendour—

“The saints like stars around His Throne
Perform their courses still;”

earthly darkness makes the light of the holy catholic faith burn all the brighter.

13. And I beheld, and heard an angel flying through the midst of heaven, saying with a loud voice, Woe, woe, woe, to the

inhabiters of the earth by reason of the other voices of the trumpet of the three angels, which are yet to sound!

When God gives warnings, He bids us listen. If great woes are foretold it is that we may pray for mercy and for patience. Lord, make us hearken to Thy messengers before the days of trouble come, that we may withdraw our hearts from this decaying world, and fix them on Thy heavenly treasure, which is sure. When the world's autumn season is closing in, and the winter approaches, we do not forget the promise of an everlasting spring.

CHAPTER IX.

1. At the sounding of the fifth angel, a star falleth from heaven, to whom is given the key of the bottomless pit. 2. He openeth the pit, and there come forth locusts like scorpions. 12. The first woe past. 13. The sixth trumpet soundeth. 14. Four angels are let loose, that were bound.

AND the fifth angel sounded, and I saw a star fall from heaven unto the earth: and to him was given the key of the bottomless pit. 2. And he opened the bottomless pit; and there arose a smoke out of the pit, as the smoke of a great furnace; and the sun and the air were darkened by reason of the smoke of the pit.

The door of hell is near us. If we will not let the door of heaven be open and God's graces descend upon us, then another door is unclosed from whence all evil arises. Bear in mind that the invisible world is real, and that we occupy a narrow space between the two realms of heaven and hell. We are preparing to take our part either with angelic choirs or with the hosts of evil. The bottomless pit may open close to me; how can I avoid falling into it unless I keep hold of my Saviour's outstretched Hand, that was pierced for me?

3. And there came out of the smoke locusts upon the earth: and unto them was given power, as the scorpions of the earth have power. 4. And it was commanded them that they should not hurt the grass of the earth, neither any green thing, neither any tree; but only those men which have not the seal of God in their foreheads.

These locusts ascending from the smoke of the pit, and having a burning, poisonous sting, express sudden, vast, and ruinous cala-

mities. Real locusts devoured fields and gardens, and left no green thing alive ; all the earth's promise turned to mouldering corruption where they went ; but these figurative locusts attacked men, not nature, and brought fresh cruelty and hatred upon earth. Those men who would not take God for their King had to bow down in misery and terror before new and strange enemies.

- 5. And to them it was given that they should not kill them, but that they should be tormented five months : and their torment was as the torment of a scorpion, when he striketh a man.*
6. And in those days shall men seek death, and shall not find it ; and shall desire to die, and death shall flee from them.

Then sinners, even in this world, have a certain foretaste of hell. Just as God's saints, amidst all their sorrows, have some enjoyment of the everlasting peace soon to open to them, so a guilty conscience has a burden of discontent, shame, and fear, which are tokens of God's wrath to come. This is not always the case, but there is such a thing as remorse without repentance, fear and pain without love. While we believe, all suffering can be borne patiently ; it cannot separate us from our Father's love. But when faith is gone, what remains to uphold us in such hours ?

- 7. And the shapes of the locusts were like unto horses prepared unto battle ; and on their heads were as it were crowns like gold, and their faces were as the faces of men. 8. And they had hair as the hair of women, and their teeth were as the teeth of lions. 9. And they had breastplates, as it were breastplates of iron ; and the sound of their wings was as the sound of chariots of many horses running to battle. 10. And they had tails like unto scorpions, and there were stings in their tails : and their power was to hurt men five months.*

These visionary locusts had the features of the real animal, yet all exaggerated and made more terrible. Their form was that of armed horses ; they had bright crowns, faces like men, long hair, sharp teeth, hard breasts, rushing wings, poisonous tails. They may represent swarms of savage enemies, who were ready to be let loose on the world, and fill it with terror and disaster. If God has set our lot in quiet times, far from such judgments as these, let us be grateful to Him Who thus spares our weakness.

- 11. And they had a king over them, which is the angel of the bottomless pit, whose name in the Hebrew tongue is Abaddon, but in the Greek tongue hath his name Apollyon.*

That is Satan's kingdom, when men aim to destroy rather than save, when selfishness rules and love grows cold. I read of such times,

and I recognise how awful the trial to faith and love must have been. Dear Lord, may I be watchful against Satan's snares when he approaches me with secret temptations, not in all the apparel of his fiery hosts. May I be ready to detect the Tempter, and set my face boldly to resist him.

12. One woe is past ; and, behold, there come two woes more hereafter.

This reminds us of Christ's own words, "Sin no more, lest a worse thing come unto thee;" God has greater chastisements in store. Let us prevent His judgments by a humble and penitent heart, and thus turn the threatened woes into occasions of mercy. We can thus alter the character of the judgment and make it end in joy at last.

13. And the sixth angel sounded, and I heard a voice from the four horns of the golden altar which is before God, 14. saying to the sixth angel which had the trumpet, Loose the four angels which are bound in the great river Euphrates.

Prayers went up from the golden altar to God, and judgments descended thence among men. How little this world's conquerors think that they are but carrying out God's orders! Their pride, their savagery, are but the loosing of powers hitherto bound, which God's mercy has long restrained, and His wrath now lets loose; He employs and overrules them.

15. And the four angels were loosed, which were prepared for an hour, and a day, and a month, and a year, for to slay the third part of men. 16. And the number of the army of the horsemen were two hundred thousand thousand : and I heard the number of them.

The times and circumstances of temptation are all known to God; our invisible as well as visible enemies are in His Hand. Even when the mighty hosts of evil are gathering against me, I can possess my soul in peace, because I trust in Divine goodness. I submit patiently to the chastisements that come as sent by God's orders; neither life nor death can tear me from Him.

17. And thus I saw the horses in the vision, and them that sat on them, having breastplates of fire, and of jacinth, and brimstone : and the heads of the horses were as the heads of lions ; and out of their mouths issued fire and smoke and brimstone. 18. By these three was the third part of men killed, by the fire, and by the smoke, and by the brimstone, which issued out of their mouths. 19. For their power is in

their mouth, and in their tails: for their tails were like unto serpents, and had heads, and with them they do hurt.

What is meant by these demon horses and fiery riders? These are some terrible visitation of Divine wrath that was to come upon the earth through the invasion of savage enemies. Man's pride and violence and hatred towards his brethren are worse things than the fire and brimstone here described. Man has made the green earth desolate by his own cruelty and folly, yet has carried out the plan of God's vengeance thereby.

20. And the rest of the men which were not killed by these plagues yet repented not of the works of their hands, that they should not worship devils, and idols of gold, and silver, and brass, and stone, and of wood: which neither can see, nor hear, nor walk: 21. neither repented they of their murders, nor of their sorceries, nor of their fornication, nor of their thefts.

We worship idols when we devote ourselves to money or pleasure instead of God; the ruining of Christian souls by tempting them to sin is murder; sorcery is the poisoning of men's minds by evil books or words; fornication includes all manner of unclean passions. All this goes on daily, and yet sickness and pain and death daily give warning; sometimes great disasters come, great ruin breaks out, but we scarcely pause from our sins to heed the warning voice. Lord, may we make a better use of Thy judgments; startle our dull hearts into wakefulness.

CHAPTER X.

1. A mighty strong angel appeareth with a book open in his hand. 6. He sweareth by him that liveth for ever, that there shall be no more time. 9. John is commanded to take and eat the book.

A ND I saw another mighty angel come down from heaven, clothed with a cloud: and a rainbow was upon his head, and his face was as it were the sun, and his feet as pillars of fire: 2. and he had in his hand a little book open: and he set his right foot upon the sea, and his left foot on the earth, 3. and cried with a loud voice, as when a lion roareth: and when he had cried, seven thunders uttered their voices.

How wonderfully in this Divine Book all nature is laid under contribution to furnish figures whereby heavenly things may be expressed! The cloud, the rainbow, the sun, fire and sea and earth, peals of thunder, all come in to tell us of glories and joys and

terrors, greater than this world knows of. Those persons are happy who use this world to remind themselves of what is above. Amidst the most beautiful, or the grandest, or the most delightful scenes that earth can offer, they listen for the angel's voice, and search the book of God's counsels which He opens to their eyes.

4. And when the seven thunders had uttered their voices, I was about to write: and I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Seal up those things which the seven thunders uttered, and write them not.

The seven peals of thunder had an intelligible message for S. John, but he was not allowed to declare it to us. God, in His Wisdom, conceals the times and circumstances of His judgment, yet we know it will surely come. His wrath upon sin, here and hereafter, is plainly declared to us in a voice of thunder, but we cannot tell the manner of its execution; enough is revealed to make us fear.

5. And the angel which I saw stand upon the sea and upon the earth lifted up his hand to heaven, 6. and sware by him that liveth for ever and ever, who created heaven, and the things that therein are, and the earth, and the things that therein are, and the sea, and the things which are therein, that there should be time no longer :

Such a great truth, so solemnly attested, should make us pause. God will surely wind up all the long history of this world, and bring time to an end. Soon there will be no more room for penitence, for works of mercy, for prayers. The last sands in time's hour-glass are running out, and we shall be for ever such as we have become during this little trial-space. Keep me, Lord, from losing or wasting this precious gift of time while it yet remains.

7. But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets.

God's mystery is the perfection of the Catholic Church by the union of all believers in one body, under Christ their Head. It is the full unfolding of all His purposes, to which all this mingled scene of strife and sorrow has been tending. Never lose faith in that unseen Divine Providence which guides all things towards an end. Scripture warnings and promises, mercy and wrath as seen round us in the world, all men's efforts and gifts and perplexities, all look towards an end which God will ere long declare.

8. And the voice which I heard from heaven spake unto me

again, and said, Go and take the little book which is open in the hand of the angel which standeth upon the sea and upon the earth. 9. *And I went unto the angel, and said unto him, Give me the little book. And he said unto me, Take it, and eat it up; and it shall make thy belly bitter, but it shall be in thy mouth sweet as honey.*

We may read and make our own a portion of God's counsels. Indeed, there is another Book (chapter v.), which only Christ the Lord Himself can open, but yet He exhibits to us a portion of His ways open and disclosed, if we will study it. This little book contained some message of comfort mixed with sorrow, which S. John was to receive and declare; he was to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest it. Here we see implied how we ought to study Scripture; it should be our daily food; it is the bread of life which God means to be nourishment for our souls.

10. *And I took the little book out of the angel's hand, and ate it up; and it was in my mouth sweet as honey: and as soon as I had eaten it, my belly was bitter.*

Why is God's Word sweet and yet bitter? It is a delight to know God's Will; Scripture is full of beauties; its very study is deeply interesting. Indeed, it has a charm beyond words for those who enter on it heartily; nothing therein is dry or repulsive when once we try to understand it. Yet thoughts of eternal loss, of God's mercy slighted, of faithless Christians, of the exceeding darkness which still hangs over God's counsels, will make our greater knowledge greater sorrow. Great delight comes first in getting to know our Bibles, afterwards great fear and grief, yet not without gleams of comfort again.

11. *And he said unto me, Thou must prophesy again before many peoples, and nations, and tongues, and kings.*

Many missionaries have gone out into strange lands at such a command as this; they have taken the story of God's wrath and love into lands where it was unknown; they have overcome difficulties of language, strange customs and modes of life, the wrath of princes, false brethren, and all manner of trials, and have bravely delivered their message. They follow the pattern of the Evangelist, share his joys and sorrows now, and will hereafter be joined with him in glory.

CHAPTER XI.

3. *The two witnesses prophesy.* 6. *They have power to shut heaven that it rain not.* 7. *The beast shall fight against them, and kill them.* 8. *They lie unburied,* ix. *and after three days and a half rise again.* 14. *The second woe is past.* 15. *The seventh trumpet soundeth.*

AND there was given me a reed like unto a rod: and the angel stood, saying, *Rise, and measure the temple of God, and the altar, and them that worship therein.* 2. *But the court which is without the temple leave out, and measure it not; for it is given unto the Gentiles: and the holy city shall they tread under foot forty and two months.*

In God's Holy City and Temple there are true worshippers, and also the profane. Some are seen by Him to dwell in the inmost sanctuary, and share in what goes on there; they offer sacrifices of praise, study His Word, see something of His glory. Others attend, but only tread the outer court; they have no entrance to His Presence, care nothing for His true service. What strange mixture is this! and yet it lasts but for a while. Let us consider which company we ourselves belong to. God has perfect knowledge of the whole Church, and knows where our true place is, whether within or without.

3. *And I will give power unto my two witnesses, and they shall prophesy a thousand two hundred and threescore days, clothed in sackcloth.*

God's witnesses stand forth to foretell His coming judgments; they prophesy from age to age, and in the latter days, amidst the decay of the world and the Church, their voices will be still more plainly heard. What a contrast is their grave voice and penitent life to the world's tidings and doings! Oh for ears to discern what these witnesses say, and to cast in our lot with them!

4. *These are the two olive trees, and the two candlesticks standing before the God of the earth.*

God's grace and light are supplied to them, and ministered by them to us. They are two, as Moses and Elias appeared together on the holy mount, and the two anointed ones to the prophet Zechariah in the restoration of the Jewish Church (Zech. iv.), and as the disciples were sent forth two and two. They are nothing in their own sight, but have power as standing in God's Presence,

and being taught by Him what to say. God may call us to join them and bear our part in the witness.

5. And if any man will hurt them, fire proceedeth out of their mouth, and devoureth their enemies : and if any man will hurt them, he must in this manner be killed. 6. These have power to shut heaven, that it rain not in the days of their prophecy : and have power over waters to turn them to blood, and to smite the earth with all plagues, as often as they will.

This power over fire and air and water and earth means the power of God's Word on faithful lips. It stings our hearts ; it moves us to anger or wrath, if not to repentance ; it calls down judgments upon us if we do not obey it. Hardness of heart, lack of God's grace, invasion of deadly sin, come of neglecting to listen to God's witnesses. May we by obedience avoid these grave judgments, of which earthly calamities are but the figure.

7. And when they shall have finished their testimony, the beast that ascendeth out of the bottomless pit shall make war against them, and shall overcome them, and kill them.

What, God's law and His prophets do not always get the victory ! No, a time comes when they seem to be entirely overthrown by the power of this world ; they are silenced, are cast out in disgrace, are thought to be done with. That will be a terrible time for Christians when the voice of the true witnesses is no more heard, and evil appears to triumph utterly.

8. And their dead bodies shall lie in the street of the great city, which spiritually is called Sodom and Egypt, where also our Lord was crucified.

Wherever foul uncleanness and evil passions reign, there is Sodom ; wherever God's servants are persecuted, there is Egypt ; wherever Christ's members have the Cross laid upon them, is that same Calvary where He suffered. The holy household were spared in Sodom, the covenant people delivered from Egypt, Christ the Lord rose again from His grave, and we may be sure that His Eye discerns some living hearts where all seems most dead. He will bring truth back again, raise up His witnesses, vindicate His servants.

9. And they of the people and kindreds and tongues and nations shall see their dead bodies three days and an half, and shall not suffer their dead bodies to be put in graves. 10. And they that dwell upon the earth shall rejoice over them, and

make merry, and shall send gifts one to another; because these two prophets tormented them that dwelt on the earth.

Unbelief triumphs in the apparent downfall of the gospel, abhors and ridicules the saints. Have we not heard these songs of triumph? Do we not know what it is to see Christ's truth regarded as an exploded superstition which has long oppressed the world, and now is rightly scoffed at? There are many who rejoice to be free from the restraint of religion; now they can live as they choose, they can sin without fear; they have cast off the thought of God and a life to come.

11. And after three days and an half the Spirit of life from God entered into them, and they stood upon their feet; and great fear fell upon them which saw them. 12. And they heard a great voice from heaven saying unto them, Come up hither. And they ascended up to heaven in a cloud; and their enemies beheld them.

Soon God raises up His saints and recompenses their sufferings; soon God turns the triumph of persecutors into shame and fear. If we do not see yet the bodies of God's servants raised up, nor hear the Voice which bids them ascend to heaven, yet He knows how to shew even here that He has not forgotten them. Do not lose faith if they seem to fall without honour, and heaven yet remains closed, and the world's triumph lasts on; a very little while and the right will win.

13. And the same hour was there a great earthquake, and the tenth part of the city fell, and in the earthquake were slain of men seven thousand: and the remnant were affrighted, and gave glory to the God of heaven.

Ah! it is calamity that brings this acknowledgment. When all went well unbelief reigned securely, but when death approaches, and all that we leaned on begins to give way, then our soul craves for a support. Thou, O God, art our strong Rock, our sure Abiding-place; nothing can disturb those who rest upon Thee. In an earthquake it is strange and terrible to feel the solid earth rocking like a wave beneath us; that represents what we shall feel on the bed of death. O Lord, may we have Thee to fly to then.

14. The second woe is past; and, behold, the third woe cometh quickly.

Here again we come close to the end of all things; all woes are done but one, and that is the last. The Vision has brought us right up to the final judgment. In this world joys and woes come in endless succession; nor must we refuse to feel them, to rejoice

with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep. Yet remember that this changeful world leads up to an unchanging state, where all will be joy or all woe.

15. And the seventh angel sounded; and there were great voices in heaven, saying, The kingdoms of this world are become the kingdoms of our Lord, and of his Christ; and he shall reign for ever and ever.

A series of great judgments to come was unfolded under the seven seals and heralded by the seven trumpets, but they all issue in the setting up of God's kingdom. Our daily prayer, "Thy kingdom come," looks for this consummation. To us, in our several places, is given the power to forward or to hinder the Divine kingdom. We may be its true subjects, its ready servants, may delight to spread it abroad; or we may live as rebels, and yet at last it will triumph. In heaven it is seen how all the world's changes bring about God's Will, though that is hidden from us on earth as yet.

16. And the four and twenty elders, which sat before God on their seats, fell upon their faces, and worshipped God, 17. saying, We give thee thanks, O Lord God Almighty, which art, and wast, and art to come; because thou hast taken to thee thy great power, and hast reigned.

Such strains of praise are uttered in heaven, where God's glory is clearly seen; but we on earth can, after our manner, join with these heavenly choirs. We can worship with lowly reverence, with hearty praise, can give thanks to God's merciful Providence for all that He has done. Indeed we are still in His outer court, can only faintly discern the hymns of praise or see the brightness within, but we trust God will set us nearer one day.

18. And the nations were angry, and thy wrath is come, and the time of the dead, that they should be judged, and that thou shouldest give reward unto thy servants the prophets, and to the saints, and them that fear thy name, small and great; and shouldest destroy them which destroy the earth.

The law of God's kingdom is recompence. He will assuredly repay. We shall eat the fruit of our doings, whether it be in reward or in punishment. Oh that this truth were well rooted in my heart, that I remembered that all reverence, all love, all self-denial, will surely bring a blessing; that all sinful indulgence or violence will bring a curse upon me! If this reward is not wholly dealt out in this life, yet the dead, too, are in God's sight, and have a reckoning to undergo.

19. And the temple of God was opened in heaven, and there was seen in his temple the ark of his testament: and there were lightnings, and voices, and thunderings, and an earthquake, and great hail.

The Ark of the Covenant, which was the sign of God's Presence with His people, had been lost for many centuries. The second Temple never possessed it; but here we have it again, only enshrined in a heavenly Temple, not one of this earth. And now it is no longer shut off by the veil, but thrown open to worshippers. God's inmost sanctuary, where He resides, is open to us; even though storms rage without, yet there is peace for us there with Him. Let the sight of His judgments abroad lead us to take refuge there.

CHAPTER XII.

1. A woman clothed with the sun travalleth. 4. The great red dragon standeth before her, ready to devour her child: 6. when she was delivered she fleeth into the wilderness. 7. Michael and his angels fight with the dragon, and prevail. 13. The dragon being cast down into the earth, persecuteth the woman.

AND there appeared a great wonder in heaven; a woman clothed with the sun, and the moon under her feet, and upon her head a crown of twelve stars:

In this new series of visions the fortunes of God's holy Church are disclosed to us. She is outwardly in a humble condition, but enjoys Divine privileges, is enveloped with God's grace, and crowned by the virtues of His saints. Let me, Lord, have eyes to discern the inward glory of Thy Church amidst her outward humiliation. Was not Thy holy mother herself but a poor Jewish maiden, who brought forth Thee in a stable, and yet was so full of faith and grace?

2. And she being with child cried, travailing in birth, and pained to be delivered.

The Church brings forth in sorrow; in every age she is travailing with souls, lamenting over those that "will not be redeemed," contending with the mighty powers of evil. The saints desire to see Christ fully formed in us, to behold our souls made ready for heaven, but the process is slow. We must share in this travail by yearning for our brethren's good, if we would belong in heart to God's Church.

3. And there appeared another wonder in heaven; and be

hold a great red dragon, having seven heads and ten horns, and seven crowns upon his heads.

We must not despise the power of our first great enemy, the devil. He has many devices to ensnare us and devour our souls ; he has power and might amongst men. How shall we conquer this fiery dragon with his seven heads unless by the power of our Divine Lord and the seven gifts of His gracious Spirit ?

4. *And his tail drew the third part of the stars of heaven, and did cast them to the earth : and the dragon stood before the woman which was ready to be delivered, for to devour her child as soon as it was born.*

Once this dragon drew down angels from heaven to cast in their lot with him and become devils, and now he leads away numbers of Christians from a true faith and holy life to become his slaves. Not to tremble before him means either that we are very ignorant of our own danger, or else that we are filled with a strong confidence in our Redeemer's power to overcome.

5. *And she brought forth a man child, who was to rule all nations with a rod of iron : and her child was caught up unto God, and to his throne.*

The Church is daily bringing forth in pain, when souls are being won for God. Christ the Lord is born afresh in converted hearts. The saints have a Divine power, they are above the world ; Satan cannot enslave them, they share in Christ's Resurrection Life. Just as Christ the Lord Himself was born in humiliation, tempted and afflicted, yet afterwards raised up to glory, so is the inward history of His members ; they also pass through weakness, pain, and trial to their happy end.

6. *And the woman fled into the wilderness, where she hath a place prepared of God, that they should feed her there a thousand two hundred and threescore days.*

This is the true home of God's Church during this present world. In the wilderness she is protected by God, fed by His grace, reserved till a day of triumph. It is a great mistake to wish the Church to be wholly conformed to the world. A Christian also must have two lives : one outward amongst men, but the other inward, alone with God, depending on His mercy, rejoicing in His society.

7. *And there was war in heaven : Michael and his angels fought against the dragon ; and the dragon fought and his angels, 8. and prevailed not ; neither was their place found any more in heaven.*

O mighty hosts of good and of evil ! When the trumpet sounds, and the armies march, and songs of triumph or cries of rage fill the air, on which side shall we be found ? How can we hope to live on without taking any side at all ? Dear friends, open your eyes and see all around and within this same contest going on, which began when angels rebelled against God. Jesus our Lord and His saints have stood forward and fought bravely in it ; now it is your turn to fight.

9. *And the great dragon was cast out, that old serpent, called the Devil, and Satan, which deceiveth the whole world : he was cast out into the earth, and his angels were cast out with him.*

Such a triumph was won once in heaven before man was, and it was won also by Christ's victorious Life and Death, and His saints have continued it still ; good must win at last, let us only keep fighting. Hope, and a humble trust in Christ's Blood, and a love for holiness, and a patient spirit, cannot be beaten. However great be the power and eloquence of evil, yet true love is a match for it.

10. *And I heard a loud voice saying in heaven, Now is come salvation, and strength, and the kingdom of our God, and the power of his Christ : for the accuser of our brethren is cast down, which accused them before our God day and night.*

Sin is a mean and vile thing, not glorious or really admirable ; it would set men against God, and God against men ; it thrives by lying and slander. The false accusations that are made against true Christians do not proceed merely of human malice ; it is Satan himself who invents and spreads them. Let us beware lest we make ourselves his instruments by taking them up.

11. *And they overcame him by the blood of the Lamb, and by the word of their testimony ; and they loved not their lives unto the death.*

O precious Blood, O saving Word, O happy choice of death rather than sin ! In this short verse is the summary of many holy lives and glorious deaths. Christ's Blood is our pardon, His faith is our strength, life the best sacrifice we can bring. Study in this verse the true secret of victory ; here is a Christian soldier's guide ; great captains have fought thus.

12. *Therefore rejoice, ye heavens, and ye that dwell in them. Woe to the inhabiter of the earth and of the sea ! for the devil is come down unto you, having great wrath, because he knoweth that he hath but a short time.*

As we see around, or feel within, more of the tempter's efforts, so should our watchfulness increase. It is but a short time that Satan is allowed to attack us; soon the conflict will be over and the victors at peace. Indeed we must bear the devil's wrath, but yet the wrath of the Lamb is much more to be feared. Stand firm against all Satan's rage, and you will find it but impotent.

- 13. And when the dragon saw that he was cast unto the earth, he persecuted the woman which brought forth the man child.*
14. And to the woman were given two wings of a great eagle, that she might fly into the wilderness, into her place, where she is nourished for a time, and times, and half a time, from the face of the serpent.

When the Church of Christ was first formed, the disciples "praised God and were in favour with all the people." But those happy days did not last long; soon there came persecution, and saints had to fly for their life. If such days should come again, and the Church lose her outward splendour and peaceful habitations, do not fear. God will prepare a place for her, nourish her, give her wings to fly upward, and strength to love and pray, such as prosperous times can never shew.

- 15. And the serpent cast out of his mouth water as a flood after the woman, that he might cause her to be carried away of the flood.*

The ten great persecutions, one after another, rose like waves against the Church. Even so in later days floods of sin, of unbelief, of cruelty, have risen suddenly, and threatened to put out the light of God's truth. How often, when all had seemed safe, believers suddenly found the flood rising round them, and all earthly foundations giving way. Those were happy who put their trust in God, and continued quietly in prayer and good works, without heeding the roar of waters.

- 16. And the earth helped the woman, and the earth opened her mouth, and swallowed up the flood which the dragon cast out of his mouth.*

Peace came after battle, day after night. The very powers of the world, that had sent forth furious assaults on God's people, turned round and made peace with them. The flood sank as rapidly as it had risen, and believers were still found adoring God, worshipping at His altar, studying His holy Word as they had been doing before.

- 17. And the dragon was wroth with the woman, and went to make war with the remnant of her seed, which keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ.*

Still the war goes on ; the devil is not discouraged, though often overcome by Divine grace. He assails us daily, tempting our faith, or desiring to lead us into sin ; but we shall overcome if we hold fast God's commandments and Christ's testimony. We are God's children and children of His holy Church by these two signs : if we keep God's holy law, that is one sign which can never be dispensed with ; and a second sign is if we maintain the Christian faith which tells of a Saviour Who died to blot out our sins.

CHAPTER XIII.

- 1.** A beast riseth out of the sea with seven heads and ten horns, to whom the dragon giveth his power. **11.** Another beast cometh up out of the earth : **14.** causeth an image to be made of the former beast, **13.** and that men should worship it, **16.** and receive his mark.

AND I stood upon the sand of the sea, and saw a beast rise up out of the sea, having seven heads and ten horns, and upon his horns ten crowns, and upon his heads the name of blasphemy. **2.** And the beast which I saw was like unto a leopard, and his feet were as the feet of a bear, and his mouth as the mouth of a lion : and the dragon gave him his power, and his seat, and great authority.

Here is a second enemy,—the world. Its power and wealth are great ; it usurps the place of God in so many hearts ; its maxims, its rewards, its threats, seem all in all to the feeble. Who has courage to resist when this world's rulers, armies, promises, boasts, contradict our Master ? The devil is not content with using mere spiritual influence against our souls ; his power is incarnate in the great and wicked men who have borne rule in this world and striven to subject all to themselves instead of to God.

- 3.** And I saw one of his heads as it were wounded to death ; and his deadly wound was healed : and all the world wondered after the beast.

What is this strange vitality in the world that seems to render it immortal ? Its lovers always pursue it unwearied. After a great war, great sorrows, great miseries, the world soon recovers. Vice and flattery and waste and drunkenness, are checked for a little while, but they soon regain their old sway. Let us fix our hearts firmly on Christ risen, that they may not be stolen away by this counterfeit marvel.

- 4.** And they worshipped the dragon which gave power unto

the beast : and they worshipped the beast, saying, Who is like unto the beast ? who is able to make war with him ? 5. And there was given unto him a mouth speaking great things and blasphemies ; and power was given unto him to continue forty and two months. 6. And he opened his mouth in blasphemy against God, to blaspheme his name, and his tabernacle, and them that dwell in heaven.

Many echo these blasphemies. The world scoffs at the notion of God incarnate and dwelling at Nazareth, or raised on the Cross of shame. It mocks at the humble duties, bright hopes, fervent prayers of a Christian.

‘Where is your Lord?’ she scornful asks,
‘Where is His hire?—we know His tasks—
Sons of a King ye boast to be,
Let us your crowns and treasures see.’”

7. And it was given unto him to make war with the saints, and to overcome them : and power was given him over all kindreds, and tongues, and nations.

Wonderful, that God should thus permit the world to triumph over the children of light. S. John saw such times, when the kingdoms of this world should no longer be openly idolatrous, but yet as truly antichristian in their power and influence. This war is not always with sword or spear, nor this power an acknowledged one. Many call themselves believers who yet devote their life to the world, enjoy its pleasures, breathe its spirit, live for its glories.

8. And all that dwell upon the earth shall worship him, whose names are not written in the book of life of the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world.

Here is our security. Nothing but God's eternal choice, His saving mercy, can protect us from being led astray. He has from everlasting thought of us, given us redemption and grace, meant us to be His children. No force, no enticements, can tear us away from Him ; only, have we kept the mark of those who are written in the Book of Life? Will God still recognise us for His own?

9. If any man have an ear, let him hear. 10. He that leadeth into captivity shall go into captivity : he that killeth with the sword must be killed with the sword. Here is the patience and the faith of the saints.

If we have not yet this spiritual ear to hearken to God's warnings, let us entreat it of Him. He can open our ears to hear, and our hearts to comprehend His Word. He bids us hold fast our patience and faith. We must, in whatever troubles come upon

us, cling to God, wait His good time, never lose patience, or seek to revenge ourselves. God knows how to recompense those who suffer for His sake, and to repay vengeance on those who afflict them. We can commit this troubled world, heaving and angry though it be, to His merciful guidance.

11. And I beheld another beast coming up out of the earth ; and he had two horns like a lamb, and he spake as a dragon.

Here is a third enemy, subtle and cunning, as well as dangerous. It imitates Divine Wisdom in outward aspect, but comes from the earth and speaks seducing words. Many who have escaped the grosser temptations which the world offers are led away by false wisdom, which promises high things, and offers intellectual eminence. God keep us from putting earthly wisdom in the stead of Divine grace. There is no help here for our hearts, no comfort when we are grieved, no help when we are tempted. It is a poor counterfeit of God's truth.

12. And he exerciseth all the power of the first beast before him, and causeth the earth and them which dwell therein to worship the first beast, whose deadly wound was healed. 13. And he doeth great wonders, so that he maketh fire come down from heaven on the earth in the sight of men, 14. and deceiveth them that dwell on the earth by the means of those miracles which he had power to do in the sight of the beast ; saying to them that dwell on the earth, that they should make an image to the beast, which had the wound by a sword, and did live. 15. And he had power to give life unto the image of the beast, that the image of the beast should both speak, and cause that as many as would not worship the image of the beast should be killed.

If we have met with the philosophers of this world we shall recognise here their great genius, eloquence, power to rule minds, and to influence them against religion. Christ, they say, is but a name ; God, a figure only ; this world is all we have to look for. Science and wealth, and great inventions, mark this age in which we live ; men study the secrets of nature, and come to the conclusion that death ends all, and that meanwhile we may live like brutes. Endless scoffs are poured on those who would still pray and hope for heaven. In these days it is not literal death that believers are threatened with, but their faith is despised, and themselves treated as fools.

16. And he causeth all, both small and great, rich and poor, free and bond, to receive a mark in their right hand, or in their

foreheads: 17. and that no man might buy or sell, save he that had the mark, or the name of the beast, or the number of his name.

In days of heathen persecution this was literally true, that Christians were not allowed to buy or sell except they would adopt some outward sign of being worshippers of the false gods. Now it is not a visible mark or name or number that false wisdom requires of us, but rather an unscrupulous tongue, a brow that knows no shame, a covetous mind that shrinks from no trick or deceit to get rich. Where shall modest, pure, and conscientious souls find refuge while God's enemies are in power? Yet He Who knows His own will help them to persevere.

18. Here is wisdom. Let him that hath understanding count the number of the beast: for it is the number of a man; and his number is Six hundred threescore and six.

Here is a false trinity opposed to the adorable Trinity of the Divine Nature. The dragon would come instead of God, the first beast or the antichristian world in the place of the Lord Jesus, the second beast or the false prophet in the place and influence of God's Holy Spirit. The three sixes mean that this false and hateful trinity claims, yet misses, the perfection of the Divine Nature, which would be set forth by the thrice-repeated number seven. The devil, the world, and false wisdom claim Divine honour, exercise a power almost like God's own. Let us have true wisdom and understanding to remain firm to the side of our God Who has made, redeemed, and consecrated us.

CHAPTER XIV.

1. The Lamb standing on mount Sion with his company. 6. An angel preacheth the gospel. 8. The fall of Babylon. 15. The harvest of the world, and putting in of the sickle. 20. The vintage and wine-press of the wrath of God.

AND I looked, and, lo, a Lamb stood on the mount Sion, and with him an hundred forty and four thousand, having his Father's name written in their foreheads.

What a consolation, to lift up our eyes from this world where God's enemies triumph so bravely, and behold by faith the Church in heaven reigning with Christ Jesus! There is the holy mountain which cannot be moved, and Christ Himself standing upon it as One victorious, and His chosen friends there with Him who have

kept steadfast their loyalty to God. God give us grace sometimes to lift up our eyes and be comforted by this great sight.

2. And I heard a voice from heaven, as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder : and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps : 3. and they sung as it were a new song before the throne, and before the four beasts, and the elders : and no man could learn that song but the hundred and forty and four thousand, which were redeemed from the earth.

What a consolation, to hear this great voice ; so full, so deep, so sweet, that earthly comparisons are all joined together to express it, and yet it cannot be fully comprehended on earth ! Down below is desolation and the tyranny of evil, but above is that great company of those who have passed through this world, and are at rest with God. Their praises, their thanks, their hopes, their care for us, arise in a great harmony of love before God's throne.

4. These are they which were not defiled with women ; for they are virgins. These are they which follow the Lamb whithersoever he goeth. These were redeemed from among men, being the firstfruits unto God and to the Lamb. 5. And in their mouth was found no guile : for they are without fault before the throne of God.

Here are four marks of the blessed, which must be attained in some measure on earth, if they are to be found perfect above : (1) Purity of body and soul, either graciously kept or most mercifully regained by the power of Christ's Blood. (2) Obedience ; they follow Christ always, through hard roads as well as through easy, and so at last reach heavenly joy with Him. (3) Unworldliness, that stands apart from the earth, that puts aside men's maxims, and is bold to differ from the common opinion. Lord, help us to be brave like these saints. (4) Truthfulness ; no falsehood, no deceit, was in their mouths ; their words were upright and just. We must strive to be such as these if we would learn that sweet song that rises up unceasingly in heaven.

6. And I saw another angel fly in the midst of heaven, having the everlasting gospel to preach unto them that dwell on the earth, and to every nation, and kindred, and tongue, and people,

Let us help forward this angel's work. Oh that we had more zeal to make the gospel known amongst the heathen ! It is God's everlasting truth, suited for every age and clime and disposition ; and yet

how many know it not ! How many in every country wander in darkness for lack of this true light !

7. Saying with a loud voice, Fear God, and give glory to him ; for the hour of his judgment is come : and worship him that made heaven, and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.

The gospel bids us repent and serve God. He speaks therein with a loud voice, and tells us how He made and redeemed the world and is about to judge it. Unless we fear our God, unless we praise Him, unless we humbly worship Him, we cannot be Christians.

8. And there followed another angel, saying, Babylon is fallen, is fallen, that great city, because she made all nations drink of the wine of the wrath of her fornication.

Mighty Babylon fell long ago, and yet men set it up again by their sins. In God's sight it is fallen and gone, but for a little while it still rises as before, full of fascination, full of grandeur, able to attract and rule. May we have eyes to see the hollowness of all that show, and to look stedfastly on the Holy Jerusalem which alone lasts.

9. And the third angel followed them, saying with a loud voice, If any man worship the beast and his image, and receive his mark in his forehead, or in his hand,

If, alas ! you have done this, if you have worshipped this world and had its evil imprinted on your thoughts and acts, make haste before it is too late and blot out this evil sign by repentance. The hand of God is able in this day of grace to remove His enemy's sign and print His own saving Cross instead. If you have kept free so far from the yoke of evil, yet be on your guard ; you have still to

“ Safe on your forehead keep
The mark by Jesus set.”

10. The same shall drink of the wine of the wrath of God, which is poured out without mixture into the cup of his indignation ; and he shall be tormented with fire and brimstone in the presence of the holy angels, and in the presence of the Lamb : 11. and the smoke of their torment ascendeth up for ever and ever : and they have no rest day nor night, who worship the beast and his image, and whosoever receiveth the mark of his name.

Against the fear of man set the fear of God. These two verses con-

tain, under figurative expressions, the awful doctrine of Eternal Loss, which Jesus our Lord Himself states plainly. They bring, to reinforce us against the threats and snares of men, the thought of somewhat after death far more terrible than all that man's vengeance can threaten us with here. I confess I know not how to reconcile this possibility of eternal ruin with God's love as set forth to us in so many ways, but, for all that, I dare not treat it as a fable. Unless it were possible for me to throw myself away utterly and hopelessly, Nature and Revelation would not tell me so, as they do, a hundred times over.

12. Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus.

They look to the future beyond the veil, they see the everlasting misery of sin, the sure triumph of good. This faith it is which makes them keep stedfast to God; their patience may be ridiculed now, but they rest on God's everlasting promises.

13. And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

Here is the state of the blessed dead contrasted with the unblessed who are mentioned before. These die in the Lord, holding fast to their faith in Christ; and they rest from their labours, having served God heartily while the day lasted; and their works follow them, for they left behind good works done, love shewn, mercy bestowed, a sweet and dear memory amongst men. When our death comes, may such a change, such a peace, be ours.

14. And I looked, and behold a white cloud, and upon the cloud one sat like unto the Son of man, having on his head a golden crown, and in his hand a sharp sickle. 15. And another angel came out of the temple, crying with a loud voice to him that sat on the cloud, Thrust in thy sickle, and reap: for the time is come for thee to reap; for the harvest of the earth is ripe. 16. And he that sat on the cloud thrust in his sickle on the earth; and the earth was reaped.

Here is the harvest. God gathers in His chosen; He takes them singly when they are ripe for His kingdom, and at the end of the world He gathers them all together into His glory. How long the winter and spring have lasted, and yet the eternal harvest-time is at hand! God grant we may be found ready to be gathered. Faith tells us how

"Christ has risen, Christ the firstfruits
Of that holy harvest-field,

Which will all its full abundance
At His second coming yield."

17. And another angel came out of the temple which is in heaven, he also having a sharp sickle. 18. And another angel came out from the altar, which had power over fire; and cried with a loud cry to him that had the sharp sickle, saying, Thrust in thy sharp sickle, and gather the clusters of the vine of the earth; for her grapes are fully ripe. 19. And the angel thrust in his sickle into the earth, and gathered the vine of the earth, and cast it into the great winepress of the wrath of God.

Here is the vintage. God executes judgment on His enemies. There is a preparation going on for wrath as well as for mercy; sin becoming more hardened, infidelity more blasphemous, individual souls growing more confirmed in evil. All this hastens onward to the time when evil will have come to its perfection, and God will bear with it no longer. Enable us, Lord, to make use of Thy salutary warnings while there is yet time. I know that sin must bring misery, and that if I cast in my lot with God's enemies I must find myself among them in the great and awful day.

20. And the winepress was trodden without the city, and blood came out of the winepress, even unto the horse bridles, by the space of a thousand and six hundred furlongs.

The wine-press was outside the city, and from it flowed forth blood as the juice of the grape in a great stream over the whole land. The distance in furlongs is expressed by four multiplied into itself, and then magnified into hundreds, to shew that all the four quarters of the earth and four winds of heaven know of it. This great vision of Judgment presses us to enter the holy Jerusalem, God's Church, where we shall be safe; to attend God's House, live by His laws, prepare ourselves to die, so that mercy may claim us in the Day of Judgment.

CHAPTER XV.

- 1. The seven angels with the seven last plagues. 3. The song of them that overcome the beast. 7. The seven vials full of the wrath of God.

AND I saw another sign in heaven, great and marvellous, seven angels having the seven last plagues; for in them is filled up the wrath of God.

This new vision describes seven great judgments of God which come

upon the throne and empire of evil. Unbelievers may think all this is but chance, or men's malice, but faith sees here the work of God's ministers, sent to trouble the false peace in which men live, and so make them repent. Once more we are told how, even before the end of the world, God will send terrible retribution upon evil.

2. And I saw as it were a sea of glass mingled with fire; and them that had gotten the victory over the beast, and over his image, and over his mark, and over the number of his name, stand on the sea of glass, having the harps of God.

No, they would not yield ; they were true to the Lamb of God, and to the saving Cross, and to the grace of the sevenfold Spirit. They held out manfully against evil, and were not ashamed of their Master ; therefore there has come now for them a time of endless peace and joy and praise. They leave us who fight now a memory of their glorious doings, and a hope of one day sharing in their victory.

3. And they sing the song of Moses the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb, saying, Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints.

They sang the song which was sung by Moses and the children of Israel after they had passed the Red Sea (Exod. xv. 1), for they too had overcome the Egyptians, had passed out of slavery into freedom, had seen their oppressors overthrown ; yet it was also the song of the Lamb, for they had overcome by Christ's Cross, in His love, by His promises ; the victory was not their own doing, for their Master had fought in them. Now they see all God's truth, understand the workings of His Providence, see how all things contributed to bring about the perfection of His saints. It is worth while to wait a long while in patience, if we may but at last join in this heavenly song.

4. Who shall not fear thee, O Lord, and glorify thy name ? for thou only art holy : for all nations shall come and worship before thee ; for thy judgments are made manifest.

Let us always be reverent. What is our religion worth if it is too familiar ? Indeed, we should praise our God for His mercies, recognise the loving-kindness of our heavenly Father made known to us in a thousand ways, but yet never forget that He is God, and we are frail creatures of earthly clay ; nay, sinners, and deserving of punishment. God's adorable perfections, which are manifest to us here on earth after a measure, will be still more clearly seen in heaven.

5. And after that I looked, and, behold, the temple of the tabernacle of the testimony in heaven was opened:

Opened to shew us something of God's counsels. On earth the Holy Place was veiled and untrodden, but Christ the Lord has now given us access to His Father's Presence, and shewn us mercies and judgments unknown before. We learn here that chastisements do not come by chance or through the means of men only; God far above orders and disposes them all to work out His designs.

6. And the seven angels came out of the temple, having the seven plagues, clothed in pure and white linen, and having their breasts girded with golden girdles. 7. And one of the four beasts gave unto the seven angels seven golden vials full of the wrath of God, who liveth for ever and ever.

These bright angels, with their golden vials full of God's wrath, tell us that God will surely avenge. He lives on, and therefore His judgments are sure, though they tarry long. May the thought of His unseen ministers of wrath restrain us from sin. I know we ought to refrain from sin because we love Him, but it is well to remember that we must fear Him too.

8. And the temple was filled with smoke from the glory of God, and from his power; and no man was able to enter into the temple, till the seven plagues of the seven angels were fulfilled.

Clouds and darkness are round about Him; indeed, we see great tokens that He is there, but none can discern His Face. Lord, enable us to humble ourselves under Thy judgments, and await patiently the full disclosure of Thy ways. Here below we must live by faith, and expect some darkness as well as light.

CHAPTER XVI.

2. The angels pour out their vials full of wrath. 6. The plagues that follow thereupon. 15. Christ cometh as a thief. Blessed are they that watch.

AND I heard a great voice out of the temple saying to the seven angels, Go your ways, and pour out the vials of the wrath of God upon the earth.

Antichrist would make this world his pleasant abiding-place, would

laugh at Scripture threats and promises, would lead all men to enjoy their good things here below ; and behold this very earth in which he trusted becomes a home of misery and death. This is what this chapter tells of ; God's people are enslaved, as of old, by proud Pharaoh in all his glory, and seven great plagues come, as the ten plagues came in Egypt, to overthrow the world and deliver the saints. There is, too, a further fulfilment of these calamities in God's judgments on the impenitent soul. Let us venture to trace here the figures of God's wrath poured out upon each of the ungodly in spiritual ruin and desolation.

2. And the first went, and poured out his vial upon the earth ; and there fell a noisome and grievous sore upon the men which had the mark of the beast, and upon them which worshipped his image.

Here is leprosy of heart come upon those who live for the world and despise God. They have put aside the true and living God, and worshipped His counterfeit ; then they find they have lost the Divine Healer, and their own sinful desires fill them with corruption.

3. And the second angel poured out his vial upon the sea ; and it became as the blood of a dead man : and every living soul died in the sea.

Here is spiritual death come upon those who give way to violent storms of passion. Faith and love and the hope of mercy are extinguished when fierce jealousy and rage stir up the heart. Peace and trust and the life of grace depart.

4. And the third angel poured out his vial upon the rivers and fountains of waters ; and they became blood. 5. And I heard the angel of the waters say, Thou art righteous, O Lord, which art, and wast, and shalt be, because thou hast judged thus. 6. For they have shed the blood of saints and prophets, and thou hast given them blood to drink ; for they are worthy. 7. And I heard another out of the altar say, Even so, Lord God Almighty, true and righteous are thy judgments.

Here is a deadly draught given to those who despise God's messengers. All that was most peaceful and refreshing turns to bitterness for them, as in the vision the streams and springs became blood. O Lord, if we, by our ill-usage of Thy mercies, have deserved this judgment, yet be pleased to spare us. Open for us again the living fountain of Thy truth, that our souls may be refreshed.

8. And the fourth angel poured out his vial upon the sun ; and power was given unto him to scorch men with fire. 9.

And men were scorched with great heat, and blasphemed the name of God, which hath power over these plagues: and they repented not to give him glory.

Here is light without love; Christ known, yet bringing no healing. Men deserve this by their misuse of religious truth. O woful day, when the Sun of Righteousness Himself is turned into our curse, when we know of Him only to be ruined by the knowledge!

10. And the fifth angel poured out his vial upon the seat of the beast; and his kingdom was full of darkness; and they gnawed their tongues for pain, 11. and blasphemed the God of heaven because of their pains and their sores, and repented not of their deeds.

Here is despair come upon those who have used their tongues and hands for evil. They experience God's judgments, yet get no profit; they see no way to repent; their latter days pass in inward darkness and desolation. All their attempts to be happy cannot take away the burden of sin unrepented, and the fearful expectation of death.

12. And the sixth angel poured out his vial upon the great river Euphrates; and the water thereof was dried up, that the way of the kings of the east might be prepared.

Here is God's protection withdrawn. As the Euphrates guarded the Holy Land from Eastern invaders, so His unseen grace guards the baptized Christian. It is grievous for us when we provoke the Spirit of God, and induce Him to leave our hearts open to temptation, our lives to His awful judgments. How frail I am! What would befall me if His guardian angels were to leave me alone!

13. And I saw three unclean spirits like frogs come out of the mouth of the dragon, and out of the mouth of the beast, and out of the mouth of the false prophet. 14. For they are the spirits of devils, working miracles, which go forth unto the kings of the earth and of the whole world, to gather them to the battle of that great day of God Almighty.

Here is great deception; the devil, the world, and false wisdom, mislead men to their ruin. Let us give heed to the words of God and Christ and the Holy Spirit that we may not be ensnared by the lies which God's enemies spread abroad. This must be our safeguard in the day of error, to have loved and fed upon the holy truths which God has declared; then we shall not be deluded, however great and many are the hosts of the enemy.

15. *Behold, I come as a thief. Blessed is he that watcheth, and keepeth his garments, lest he walk naked, and they see his shame.*

God has clad our souls in the garment of Christ's righteousness ; what will be our shame before men and angels if we have lost that, and have to stand in all our vileness, with no shelter from atoning mercy ? Death and judgment are near ; is it well for us to slumber on carelessly, and forget the awful warnings which Christ has uttered ?

16. *And he gathered them together into a place called in the Hebrew tongue Armageddon.*

This was the place called Megiddo in the Old Testament, near that great plain of Esdraelon where God's people had experienced two great victories and two great defeats. It represents to us the final conflict of all, not with earthly arms, nor on a literal battlefield, but with spiritual armies encompassing the soul and contending for it. Shall ours be a defeat or a victory, endless loss or joy without end ? The battle is not over yet, and no one can tell its issue.

17. *And the seventh angel poured out his vial into the air ; and there came a great voice out of the temple of heaven, from the throne, saying, It is done.*

The seventh vial reminds us of the day of death, when all our probation will be over. As God finished the work of creation in the great seven days, as Christ the Lord finished His work of redemption upon the Cross, so the work of mercy or of wrath will be finished in each soul. Let us by then have finished our repentance, our conversion, our deeds of mercy.

18. *And there were voices, and thunders, and lightnings ; and there was a great earthquake, such as was not since men were upon the earth, so mighty an earthquake, and so great.*

19. *And the great city was divided into three parts, and the cities of the nations fell : and great Babylon came in remembrance before God, to give unto her the cup of the wine of the fierceness of his wrath.* 20. *And every island fled away, and the mountains were not found.*

Lord, shake our hearts now while it may profit us ; leave us not in false peace till that day come when all on which we leant shall give way suddenly. Speak to our hearts, thunder on us with Thy Word, enlighten us with Thy truth, that we may prevent the day of Thy wrath by a salutary repentance. This great convulsion of nature which is to take place at the end of the world represents to us the inward desolation which besets the dying.

21. And there fell upon men a great hail out of heaven, every stone about the weight of a talent: and men blasphemed God because of the plague of the hail; for the plague thereof was exceeding great.

Will not then pain and anguish, God's great judgments, all the restlessness and misery of a lingering death, convert our hearts to God? No; indeed it is not so. Evil passions may still rule them, unbelief may make all desolate, old hatreds lie down in the dust with us. May we be sensible to God's mercies now, for fear even His judgments then should have no healing power.

CHAPTER XVII.

3, 4. A woman arrayed in purple and scarlet, with a golden cup in her hand, sitteth upon the beast, 5. which is great Babylon, the mother of all abominations. 9. The interpretation of the seven heads, 12. and the ten horns. 8. The punishment of the whore. 14. The victory of the Lamb.

AND there came one of the seven angels which had the seven vials, and talked with me, saying unto me, Come hither; I will shew unto thee the judgment of the great whore that sitteth upon many waters: 2. with whom the kings of the earth have committed fornication, and the inhabitants of the earth have been made drunk with the wine of her fornication.

Here is this world's wealth and splendour and delight visibly personified. This is the false love which has won the hearts of so many Christians, and turned them away from God. In the days when S. John wrote, the opposition to God's kingdom was summed up in the great city of Rome, which bore rule in the world, and was full of idolatry and vice; but this same woman, fair and false, is to be found in every place where God's children forget their heavenly Father, and open their hearts to evil instead.

3. So he carried me away in the spirit into the wilderness: and I saw a woman sit upon a scarlet coloured beast, full of names of blasphemy, having seven heads and ten horns. 4. And the woman was arrayed in purple and scarlet colour, and decked with gold and precious stones and pearls, having a golden cup in her hand full of abominations and filthiness of her fornication:

Here is a combination of outward glory with profaneness and vileness. This woman guided the world, claimed Divine honours,

displayed all that was rare and costly, and yet all she had to offer was foul and horrible. Lord, open our eyes to discern the beauty of Divine wisdom ; let purity, and compassion, and humble duties be precious in our eyes, that so we may turn away from this splendid temptress. Those who would live for success in this world must make up their minds to practise this world's evil arts and deceits.

5. And upon her forehead was a name written, MYSTERY, BABYLON THE GREAT, THE MOTHER OF HARLOTS AND ABOMINATIONS OF THE EARTH.

Once the literal Babylon had been the representative of idolatry, the oppressor of God's people ; now imperial Rome had come to the same place of power. Babylon is the community of those who obey the devil's guidance, despise God, practise sin. Let us cling to the holy Jerusalem, God's Church, and behave as its faithful citizens, and so keep out of Babylon and its approaching ruin.

6. And I saw the woman drunken with the blood of the saints, and with the blood of the martyrs of Jesus : and when I saw her, I wondered with great admiration.

S. John was amazed to see that God gave such power and glory to His enemies. What, they were able to persecute saints, destroy them, root up good works, lord it over God's world ? Yes, for a while. This is the mystery of the Cross which is to be accomplished in Christ's members, as it was in Himself.

7. And the angel said unto me, Wherefore didst thou marvel ? I will tell thee the mystery of the woman, and of the beast that carrieth her, which hath the seven heads and ten horns.

Can we understand this mystery ? The woman sitting on the seven-headed beast represented in S. John's day pagan Rome, that ruled over the world then, and had begun a great persecution against Christ's Church. But she still lives and fascinates redeemed souls by her false splendour, and the mighty beast with seven heads still raises up his power against Christ's.

8. The beast that thou sawest was, and is not ; and shall ascend out of the bottomless pit, and go into perdition : and they that dwell on the earth shall wonder, whose names were not written in the book of life from the foundation of the world, when they behold the beast that was, and is not, and yet is.

One after another the world's great empires have risen and passed away. Each, as it came, seemed to embody Divine power, seemed to be eternal.

“ Hiding the glorious sky
From half the nations, till they own
No holier name, no mightier throne.”

Thank God that there have always been some faithful hearts to discern the nothingness of all that splendour.

9. And here is the mind which hath wisdom. The seven heads are seven mountains, on which the woman sitteth. 10. And there are seven kings: five are fallen, and one is, and the other is not yet come; and when he cometh, he must continue a short space. 11. And the beast that was, and is not, even he is the eighth, and is of the seven, and goeth into perdition.

These appear to mean so many great empires, in which the power of this world has been summed up in one age or another. Nay, it may be that this dread antichristian power has crept even into the professing Church of Christ and borne rule there. Christians should frequently consider who is their true Master. Unless they acknowledge God in all things, and submit themselves to His gracious Will, and study to serve Him, they may find themselves on His enemies' side, even while they shew a very religious demeanour. It is within that the king of love or of hatred rules, within that the strife goes on, and the issue is decided for all eternity.

12. And the ten horns which thou sawest are ten kings, which have received no kingdom as yet; but receive power as kings one hour with the beast. 13. These have one mind, and shall give their power and strength unto the beast.

Not only the great world empire, but the lesser kingdoms of the earth take the side of Antichrist; their dominion goes to swell his, their warfare is against Divine truth. All this can hold true of kingdoms and princes that are nominally Christian, as well as of heathen powers. Alas! the cross inlaid with jewels is not the true Cross at all; the kingdom of Christ exalted, protected, and glorified below has too often become akin to the kingdom of Antichrist. God's Spirit does not really rule in society because it makes a profession of belief in the gospel.

14. These shall make war with the Lamb, and the Lamb shall overcome them: for he is Lord of lords, and King of kings: and they that are with him are called, and chosen, and faithful.

This verse contains the substance of the whole Book of the Revelation; it tells us how Christ the Lord overcomes evil,—and not Christ only, but His saints with Him and by His grace. In this book great visions, marvels, figures, succeed one another in a

stately procession, deep mysteries are dimly revealed, bright gleams flash on us, deep thunders roar, but it all comes to this, there is a warfare of Christ the Lord and His Church against the dominion of evil, in which right must win.

15. *And he saith unto me, The waters which thou sawest, where the whore sitteth, are peoples, and multitudes, and nations, and tongues.*

These are the waves of this troublesome world ; they are mighty, and rage horribly, but yet Christians know of a sure anchor, look forward to a safe haven, hear a voice above the roaring of the waters. Christ's enemies seem for a time to sit enthroned on this heaving sea of the world, but yet it is but for a moment ; believers know that God only "sitteth above the water-flood," and "remaineth a King for ever."

16. *And the ten horns which thou sawest upon the beasts these shall hate the whore, and shall make her desolate and naked, and shall eat her flesh, and burn her with fire.* 17. *For God hath put in their hearts to fulfil his will, and to agree, and give their kingdom unto the beast, until the words of God shall be fulfilled.*

God's providence has often made use of the world's kingdoms to destroy the world's glory. Ambition, and covetousness, and evil desires have ruined all that glory and peace which seemed so lasting. In great convulsions and sorrows people have come to recognise that God is the true King ; they see His providence at work pulling down over their heads all that great fabric in which they have dwelt so securely.

18. *And the woman which thou sawest is that great city, which reigneth over the kings of the earth.*

Pagan Rome ruled over all nations, embraced all idolatries, followed after all vices, hated and reviled God's saints. Therefore it was worthily chosen to represent the world as opposed to Christ. But the image of this same antichristian pride is to be found in the proud soul which has thrown off obedience to God, and claims honour from men, yet is secretly a slave to vile desires. How many such outwardly glorious, inwardly debased, natures are abroad in the world !

CHAPTER XVIII.

2. Babylon is fallen. 4. The people of God commanded to depart out of her. 9. The kings of the earth, 11. with the merchants and mariners, lament over her. 20. The saints rejoice for the judgments of God upon her.

AND after these things I saw another angel come down from heaven, having great power; and the earth was lightened with his glory. 2. And he cried mightily with a strong voice, saying, Babylon the great is fallen, is fallen, and is become the habitation of devils, and the hold of every foul spirit, and a cage of every unclean and hateful bird.

In this chapter the fall of the great pagan Empire of Rome, which was then oppressing God's people, is described in terms borrowed from the denunciations of the prophets against Tyre, Nineveh, and Babylon in the days of old. This was to make believers feel that as God wrought ruin against His enemies, and preserved His chosen in other days, so He would now. This great glory that claimed their worship, this great majesty which struck them with fear, was all of the earth, and should go to destruction like those other empires had gone. Let us cling to that which truly lasts, and remember how soon all the world's glory will be over.

3. For all nations have drunk of the wine of the wrath of her fornication, and the kings of the earth have committed fornication with her, and the merchants of the earth are waxed rich through the abundance of her delicacies.

Nations drank of her wine, kings were ensnared by her blandishments, merchants grew rich by her gifts. How shall I keep myself free from so great a fascination? Only by a stedfast gaze on things eternal. If I seek a right judgment from God in prayer, love to approach His holy altar and study His holy Word, keep myself from sinful pleasures, then I shall retain my senses, the world will not ensnare or deceive me. Though so many walk in her ways, yet will not I.

4. And I heard another voice from heaven, saying, Come out of her, my people, that ye be not partakers of her sins, and that ye receive not of her plagues.

What is the difference between God's people and the citizens of Babylon? Those who set their heart on this earth, and live for

riches or pleasure are Babylonians, and are caught in the city's downfall. Those who mind the things that are above and fly from evil, who repent, pray, and seek God's Face, are citizens of the holy Jerusalem, and Christ their King will protect them.

5. For her sins have reached unto heaven, and God hath remembered her iniquities. 6. Reward her even as she rewarded you, and double unto her double according to her works : in the cup which she hath filled fill to her double.

Here is retribution ; it waited a long while, but is come at last. Observe what a great weight of iniquity there is to be paid for. Sinners store up against themselves so much ruin, are so deep in debt to God's justice, and He has long forborne, and not claimed payment, but at last He comes, and will be put off no longer. The longer justice has waited, the fuller will vengeance be when it comes.

7. How much she hath glorified herself, and lived deliciously, so much torment and sorrow give her : for she saith in her heart, I sit a queen, and am no widow, and shall see no sorrow. 8. Therefore shall her plagues come in one day, death, and mourning, and famine ; and she shall be utterly burned with fire : for strong is the Lord God who judgeth her.

Christians remember that they must "glory only in the Cross of our Lord Jesus Christ ;" they know that "she which liveth in pleasure is dead while she liveth." Their hearts are widowed because the Bridegroom is absent ; they dare not live self-indulgent lives because they remember His crown of thorns, His unceasing labour and anxiety for souls. Such grave reflections as these, drawn from God's Word, are an antidote to the world's enticing promises.

9. And the kings of the earth, who have committed fornication and lived deliciously with her, shall bewail her, and lament for her, when they shall see the smoke of her burning. 10. Standing afar off for the fear of her torment, saying, Alas, alas that great city Babylon, that mighty city ! for in one hour is thy judgment come.

O magnificence and greatness of this world, how hard it is for you to learn the frailty of things below ! Glory to God for placing us in humbler stations where we have not such great erections of pride round us to hide the sky. There is a story of a careless, sinful princess who said, when warned of judgment to come, "God will think twice before He condemns a person of my rank." We smile at this, but yet it is hard for us to recognise that we are but common clay, dressed up only for this brief life with some titles and honours, but soon about to lay them aside for ever.

11. *And the merchants of the earth shall weep and mourn over her; for no man buyeth their merchandise any more: 12. the merchandise of gold, and silver, and precious stones, and of pearls, and fine linen, and purple, and silk, and scarlet, and all thyine wood, and all manner vessels of ivory, and all manner vessels of most precious wood, and of brass, and iron, and marble, 13. and cinnamon, and odours, and ointments, and frankincense, and wine, and oil, and fine flour, and wheat, and beasts, and sheep, and horses, and chariots, and slaves, and souls of men.*

The purpose of all this chapter is to abase what seemed great in men's eyes, and lead them to seek for the true riches. Therefore it sums up all the commerce which poured into the world's great city day by day, and recites the speedy and utter ruin which is coming upon it. Let us be rich in good works, lay up our treasures in heaven, gladly impart in mercy and liberality what God has trusted to our hands, then our transitory wealth will turn into an everlasting possession, safe for ever.

14. *And the fruits that thy soul lusted after are departed from thee, and all things which were dainty and goodly are departed from thee, and thou shalt find them no more at all.*

What a change, from luxury to famine, from splendour to misery! While these riches and comforts are ours we can bless them by bestowing them on others, use the world's gifts to comfort God's people, make them eternal in heaven instead of most frail and perishable on earth. He puts in our hands many luxuries and delicacies which He designs us to bestow on His suffering members.

15. *The merchants of these things, which were made rich by her, shall stand afar off for the fear of her torment, weeping and wailing, 16. and saying, Alas, alas that great city, that was clothed in fine linen, and purple, and scarlet, and decked with gold, and precious stones, and pearls!*

Listen to the mourners at this great funeral. All the world's grandeur is being buried, and these are lamenting for it. And indeed it touches our hearts to see great beauty, great splendour, great power, reduced to dust and ashes; yet it is more worth while to weep for the loss of a soul. There are souls whom God made for Himself, redeemed by Christ's Blood, decked with gifts and graces, and who are now utterly ruined, destitute of good, plunged in darkness. Here are glories brought to nothing.

17. *For in one hour so great riches is come to nought. And*

every shipmaster, and all the company in ships, and sailors, and as many as trade by sea, stood afar off, 18. and cried when they saw the smoke of her burning, saying, What city is like unto this great city! 19. And they cast dust on their heads, and cried, weeping and wailing, saying, Alas, alas that great city, wherein were made rich all that had ships in the sea by reason of her costliness! for in one hour is she made desolate.

In this vision the sailors are seen lamenting over the ruin of that great city to which they traded. "How suddenly," they say, "has its ruin come." One day we shall stand by a corpse or see a funeral go by, and say, "This person was very rich, or very clever. Such a one had wonderful gifts, opportunities, taste; while he lived he did this or that, but now it is all done with." Think often of that hour which will annihilate all life's chances, and turn our busy days into eternal silence.

20. Rejoice over her, thou heaven, and ye holy apostles and prophets; for God hath avenged you on her.

Strange ; in men's eyes there is desolation, in men's ears the sound of wailing, but out of human sight and hearing hymns of rejoicing are uttered. On earth sadness and trouble reign,

"The while for joy and victory
Saints and apostles sing on high."

May we learn to fix our gaze on the unseen glory, apply our ears to the heavenly melody which God's servants enjoy behind the veil.

21. And a mighty angel took up a stone like a great mill-stone, and cast it into the sea, saying, Thus with violence shall that great city Babylon be thrown down, and shall be found no more at all.

From a great height the fall is so much greater. May God keep us on the safe level of common duties, free from great temptations, great riches, great responsibilities, that so by His mercy we may be upheld in the day of trial. Not all knowledge, nor experience, nor gifts, can keep us from being overthrown by the tempter. We need God's special grace, His outstretched hand at every moment. When we hear of others falling into deadly sin or unbelief, it should make us walk the more humbly. What are we that we should do better?

22. And the voice of harpers, and musicians, and of pipers, and trumpeters, shall be heard no more at all in thee; and no craftsman, of whatsoever craft he be, shall be found any more

in thee ; and the sound of a millstone shall be heard no more at all in thee ; 23. and the light of a candle shall shine no more at all in thee ; and the voice of the bridegroom and of the bride shall be heard no more at all in thee : for thy merchants were the great men of the earth ; for by thy sorceries were all nations deceived.

Ruin hung over the world's great empire for its avarice, foulness, and cruelty. The All-seeing Eye passed by the golden house of Nero, the Forum and its triumphs, the temples and towers built to last for ever, and looked with favour upon believing hearts who lived by faith, followed love and purity. God still judges thus ; what is grandest in man's estimation is nothing before Him. He warns us not to be fascinated by things below.

24. And in her was found the blood of prophets, and of saints, and of all that were slain upon the earth.

If God's love is great in sending us Divine messengers to teach us His holy gospel and save our souls, then our ill-usage or contempt of these messengers must be grievous in His sight. Plainly, He remembers and avenges the death of His saints. How can our feeble thoughts represent this great truth, that all injustice and cruelty is remembered and will be punished ! Here it seems to pass and be forgotten, the Avenger makes no sign, yet out of sight it is entered in God's Book, added to His terrible reckoning of wrath to come. God keep us from falling under such judgments.

CHAPTER XIX.

i. God is praised in heaven for judging the great whore, and avenging the blood of his saints. 7. The marriage of the Lamb. 10. The angel will not be worshipped. 17. The fowls called to the great slaughter.

AND after these things I heard a great voice of much people in heaven, saying, Alleluia ; Salvation, and glory, and honour, and power, unto the Lord our God : 2. for true and righteous are his judgments : for he hath judged the great whore, which did corrupt the earth with her fornication, and hath avenged the blood of his servants at her hand.

In this chapter we pass from the silence and desolation of ruined Babylon to the songs of the heavenly city ; from wailings to alleluias ; from darkness below to the everlasting light of God's Presence ; from the harlot to the virgin bride of the Lamb ; from the world's false judgments to the fulfilment of God's true and righteous

sentence. May we take up this song of heaven and acknowledge God's truth and righteousness as shewn in all His government.

3. And again they said, Alleluia. And her smoke rose up for ever and ever.

What is this smoke rising up for ever and ever but the remembrance of what God has saved us from, which will always make part of the blessedness of heaven. Naturally I was a child of sin, and inclined to evil ; also, I often followed after sin and stained my Christian calling. I have, over and over again, been preserved from ruin, or brought back from the very jaws of hell. All this remembrance of sin and misery done with will not spoil heaven, but make its light brighter, its peace more precious. How Divine Love has rescued me from the depths of evil and the misery which evil brings !

4. And the four and twenty elders and the four beasts fell down and worshipped God that sat on the throne, saying, Amen ; Alleluia.

When we celebrate the blessed Sacrament here on earth we copy this heavenly worship. There too is deep adoration ; we worship our King spiritually present at His altar-throne ; we make the Church's prayers and intercessions our own by "Amen ;" we join in the praises of angels, we sing their very words. Let our reverence, our gratitude, our earnestness when we kneel there be after the pattern of the unseen powers.

5. And a voice came out of the throne, saying, Praise our God, all ye his servants, and ye that fear him, both small and great.

Both small and great can praise God. He welcomes every note of praise, though it be from feeble lips. Here on earth, as there in heaven, the great harmony of praise is made up of the worship of innumerable souls, each with his own tale of mercies received. I must not miss my own humble part in this Divine hymn.

6. And I heard as it were the voice of a great multitude, and as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of mighty thunderings, saying, Alleluia : for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth. 7. Let us be glad and rejoice, and give honour to him : for the marriage of the Lamb is come, and his wife hath made herself ready.

What a marriage hymn is this ! It celebrates the perfect union of believers with their Saviour. All that is evil has been subdued, all that is good has been perfected ; now there is peace and joy for

ever. Angels and saints join to celebrate God's glory and the happiness of His saints. If we listen attentively we shall be able to catch some fragments of this hymn of praise now, but the fulness of it is reserved for heaven.

8. And to her was granted that she should be arrayed in fine linen, clean and white: for the fine linen is the righteousness of saints.

How different is this from the scarlet and purple, the gold and jewels, in which the false enchantress was arrayed ! May we have eyes to discern this true beauty and choose it ; it remains pure and bright when the world's false glory has vanished for ever.

9. And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

This is the state of the happy guests who are welcomed by Christ. There, after the labours of life, they enjoy the peace and refreshment of the heavenly banquet, behold God's Face, acknowledge what He has done for them. What sort of characters ought we to be so as to be welcome at that feast ? The Lamb of God will not have any guests there who are not pure-minded, humble, and true. His Word tells us how to prepare ourselves.

10. And I fell at his feet to worship him. And he said unto me, See thou do it not: I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren that have the testimony of Jesus: worship God: for the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy.

Men and angels are but fellow-servants in God's household. Both in their several stations do God's bidding and declare His holy Will. Both have one common Lord of Whom they speak. This verse unites all God's servants in earth and heaven in one great company, all bent on declaring Christ's mysteries by the aid of the Holy Spirit. No creature is fit to be worshipped by us ; our highest adoration must be reserved for our Divine Master.

11. And I saw heaven opened, and behold a white horse; and he that sat upon him was called Faithful and True, and in righteousness he doth judge and make war.

In the vision that follows Christ the Lord is revealed, not as a Lamb or a Bridegroom, but as a mighty warrior going forth at the head of His army. He reminds us that we must take a side. We live as yet in time of war, not peace ; the hosts of good and of evil are ranged round us ; we must declare ourselves and join in this fight. If we live as Christ's brave soldiers we may be sure He will give

us the promised reward. No fear of His forgetting or deceiving any.

12. His eyes were as a flame of fire, and on his head were many crowns; and he had a name written, that no man knew, but he himself.

An aspect so terrible, so mysterious. His eyes pierce through all disguises, His head is adorned with many crowns in token that all kingdoms are in His hand. His Name or Nature is Divine, out of our reach. Yet there is something of comfort also in the vision, for we know that He loves us as well as sees through us, that He has many crowns to give as well as to wear. Besides, His incomprehensible Godhead makes Him our eternal Friend.

13. And he was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called the Word of God.

This is He of Whom we read in the gospels, Who underwent scourging and the Cross, and Who is called the Word made Flesh. Learn the lesson of His Passion, profit by the holy teachings which He uttered while on earth, and then you will not be confounded when He appears in His awful majesty.

14. And the armies which were in heaven followed him upon white horses, clothed in fine linen, white and clean.

What a great host of warriors on God's side ! Their horses and robes are white, to signify purity ; they follow the Divine Conqueror to battle, not as if they fought in their own strength, but with Him, and after His orders. Their desire is to put down evil and make love and peace triumph.

15. And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God.

Let not our sins change the Word of Life into a deadly sword, the saving Cross into a sceptre of iron, the precious Blood into the wine of God's wrath. See how all those things which are most saving, most healing, the clearest tokens of Divine Love, are all wrested by impenitence into an opposite sense, and become so many signs of vengeance.

16. And he hath on his vesture and on his thigh a name written, KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS.

Earth's mighty ones may learn to bow down to One Who is their Lord. What a salutary lesson for those whom birth or wealth, or their achievements, have raised above their brethren, to learn sub-

mission and obedience to their Divine Sovereign, Who will call them to account for their administration of His affairs !

17. *And I saw an angel standing in the sun; and he cried with a loud voice, saying to all the fowls that fly in the midst of heaven, Come and gather yourselves together unto the supper of the great God ; 18. that ye may eat the flesh of kings, and the flesh of captains, and the flesh of mighty men, and the flesh of horses, and of them that sit on them, and the flesh of all men, both free and bond, both small and great.*

This image of a great and utter defeat, when the bodies of the slain are left to be devoured by birds of prey, teaches us of the entire overthrow of evil. God's truth will be vindicated, His judgments take place, His glory be seen. There will be one day still mightier manifestations of evil than have yet been known, but all this only in order to a more complete overthrow. When will the day come when all this hidden and imperfect war, this troubled scene of mingled defeat and victory, shall pass into the last great judgment? Still, as things are now, we are serving in one of the two armies, that of God or that of the world.

19. *And I saw the beast, and the kings of the earth, and their armies, gathered together to make war against him that sat on the horse, and against his army.*

What kind of attack is this? It is not one with literal sword and spear, but with weapons of pride, blasphemy, and enticement to sin. It is a war that goes on through the ages, between Christ crucified and His saints on the one side, and the hosts of sin on the other. There have been many attacks and defeats already, but still graver and more dangerous times are to come.

20. *And the beast was taken, and with him the false prophet that wrought miracles before him, with which he deceived them that had received the mark of the beast, and them that worshipped his image. These both were cast alive into a lake of fire burning with brimstone. 21. And the remnant were slain with the sword of him that sat upon the horse, which sword proceeded out of his mouth : and all the fowls were filled with their flesh.*

This is the end of the conflict. The antichristian world, and the false wisdom which supplied it with lying counsels, shall both be put out of the way of God's servants for ever. All who followed them shall reap ruin. How mighty looked the beast, how wise and winning the false prophet in prosperous days ! but when disaster comes, then is seen their utter powerlessness to help their friends.

CHAPTER XX.

2. Satan bound for a thousand years. 6. The first resurrection: they blessed that have part therein. 7. Satan let loose again. 8. Gog and Magog. 10. The devil cast into the lake of fire and brimstone. 12. The last and general resurrection.

AND I saw an angel come down from heaven, having the key of the bottomless pit and a great chain in his hand. 2. And he laid hold on the dragon, that old serpent, which is the Devil, and Satan, and bound him a thousand years, 3. and cast him into the bottomless pit, and shut him up, and set a seal upon him, that he should deceive the nations no more, till the thousand years should be fulfilled: and after that he must be loosed a little season.

How was Satan cast into the abyss and bound for a thousand years, and when will he be loosed thence? It may be that our Lord's Incarnation restrained his power, the downfall of idolatry cast him down from his high place, the spread of Christian truth has been a chain to him; yet in the latter days he will resume his old might again. How miserable it would be for us to become slaves of this ruined angel, who is himself but God's rebellious slave! Indeed, if we will, our Lord and Conqueror can unloose our heaviest chain and set us free.

4. And I saw thrones, and they sat upon them, and judgment was given unto them: and I saw the souls of them that were beheaded for the witness of Jesus, and for the word of God, and which had not worshipped the beast, neither his image, neither had received his mark upon their foreheads, or in their hands; and they lived and reigned with Christ a thousand years. 5. But the rest of the dead lived not again until the thousand years were finished. This is the first resurrection.

While the time passes here on earth in our various busy days or trifles, there exists a world invisible which is here set forth to us. Those who have suffered patiently, have overcome evil gloriously, have kept their faith, are still living there—out of sight to us, but in God's Presence, are enjoying peace and honour with Him. Indeed, on earth "fools counted their life madness and their end without honour;" but God has given them a better life than we know of. That was a blessed sacrifice they made in giving up all that earth could offer sooner than be unfaithful.

6. Blessed and holy is he that hath part in the first resurrection : on such the second death hath no power, but they shall be priests of God and of Christ, and shall reign with him a thousand years.

They are then priests in God's temple, whatever was their calling on earth. They reign, though their life was humble here below ; they know no more corruption, pain, or sorrow. How hard for us who are burdened with this world's cares to lift our minds to that holy and happy place where the saints are at rest, to remember how.

“ Still with Thee their Sabbath keep,
They who 'neath the altar sleep.”

7. And when the thousand years are expired, Satan shall be loosed out of his prison, 8. and shall go out to deceive the nations which are in the four quarters of the earth, Gog and Magog, to gather them together to battle : the number of whom is as the sand of the sea.

We tremble to read of these latter years of the Church when the powers of evil are unloosed, deception prevails, hatred to all good increases. If it be God's Will that we live into such times, may He give us courage to withstand a world in arms. Sometimes at the end of a Christian's life he appears to be given over to his spiritual enemies, as the Church will seem to be to hers ; they encompass him round and almost prevail against him. Yet perseverance does not fail those who trust in God ; they know He is still their God and will save them, whatever storms Satan may raise.

9. And they went up on the breadth of the earth, and compassed the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city : and fire came down from God out of heaven, and devoured them.

The Church is a camp which enemies besiege, but its walls still hold out against all the devil's assaults. Christians are soldiers armed for fight ; their holy city is not yet in peace, but God fights for them, He is their strength, and succours them from heaven. In this Book of the Revelation we have read many times in many figures of the great conflict between good and evil, and its certain issue. Here we read of it for the last time. God give us grace to remain faithful soldiers of our heavenly King, and be found in our ranks with our face to the foe when He returns.

10. And the devil that deceived them was cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, where the beast and the false prophet are, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever.

Is this the end of a spirit that was once a glorious angel set high in heaven? Are all his wondrous gifts and wiles come to endless ruin and misery? Then, O my soul, fear for thyself, let no pride in talents or confidence in purity make thee feel secure. So great a fall came of pride; do thou remain humble and watchful all thy days.

11. And I saw a great white throne, and him that sat on it, from whose face the earth and the heaven fled away; and there was found no place for them.

Instead of that look of wrath and majesty which shall change the face of heaven and earth, do Thou, Lord, turn on me Thy Face in mercy; change my life, humble my pride, let all my former sins disappear before the light of Thy Presence.

12. And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and another book was opened, which is the book of life: and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, according to their works.

God will judge us both from the book of His mysteries and from the book of our own works. Our mind fails to comprehend the manner of that great judgment. All we know is that we ourselves shall be the prisoners tried, and that eternal issues wait upon the decision. Let every return of Advent with its warnings be to us a reminder of that day.

13. And the sea gave up the dead which were in it; and death and hell delivered up the dead which were in them: and they were judged every man according to their works.

As we commit to the earth or the deep the bodies of those we love, we pray that when the dreadful Judgment Day shall come they may receive those bodies again to glory, then made pure and incorruptible. We entreat Christ the Lord to set them then on His right hand with His holy and elect, and let them hear His most sweet and comfortable words, "Come, ye blessed of My Father!"

14. And death and hell were cast into the lake of fire. This is the second death. 15. And whosoever was not found written in the book of life was cast into the lake of fire.

O great mysteries which we cannot sound! O terrible doom of evil, which is true if anything is true, though veiled in figures too hard for us! At the last there is no middle state; it is either being with God, or being without God; in happiness, or in misery; and this for ever. If this is so, what manner of person ought I to be?

CHAPTER XXI

1. A new heaven and a new earth. 10. The heavenly Jerusalem, with a full description thereof. 23. She needeth no sun, the glory of God is her light. 24. The kings of the earth bring their riches unto her.

AND I saw a new heaven and a new earth : for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away ; and there was no more sea.

How can we understand this account that follows of the new heaven and new earth ? The three disciples had a glimpse of it when they saw our Lord transfigured on the mount. S. Paul too had a vision of it when he was caught up into the third heaven ; but it is too great for our minds or our tongues to deal with. All we know is that God, Who has poured out such a wealth of beauty on this present world, must have yet greater treasures in store for that one wherein righteousness dwells. There is no sea there ; that means no division, no storm, no wreck. All is light and peace.

2. And I John saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down from God out of heaven, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.

It is holy, not like the earthly Jerusalem, which became a den of robbers ; it is new, nothing in it worn out or ruined ; it is framed by God, not by man ; it is beautiful with a lasting and exquisite beauty. May I remember that this world is not my home. God prepares for me elsewhere something which will satisfy all my heart's longings. This world is but a road, a camp, an exercising-ground ; my home is yet to come.

3. And I heard a great voice out of heaven saying, Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God.

What a Divine society ! God shall dwell with His people, no longer obscurely and by glimpses and in ordinances, but in a familiar and lasting way. He will be always felt to be their Friend, their King, their Father ; they will be purified and made fit to enjoy His Presence, which would be death to the ungodly.

4. And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes ; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither

shall there be any more pain : for the former things are passed away.

No more death, no more sorrow, no more pain. What happy news for poor suffering mankind ! Our tears in this world are real enough ; we have bitter experience of misery and loss and bodily anguish. What with troubles we have and troubles we fear life is full of sadness. How shall we endure it but for the hope of eternal comfort ? We must lift up our hearts to that dear home where our God waits to console us.

5. And he that sat upon the throne said, Behold, I make all things new. And he said unto me, Write : for these words are true and faithful.

This is, my God, Thy sure, Thy eternal promise. I rely upon it. At the beginning God made all things in a wise order and pronounced them very good ; they shew forth His glory. That is related in the first chapter of the Scripture record ; and when I look to the end of the Holy Book I see there foreshadowings of another creation which shall represent God's perfections still better. I am not ungrateful for the mercies and wonders of this earth, but I hope to see things yet more wonderful.

6. And he said unto me, It is done. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end. I will give unto him that is athirst of the fountain of the water of life freely.

This is the passport to all the blessedness here described ; you must desire it, and you will reach it. Only be athirst, long for, seek for earnestly this Divine comfort and joy, and God will give it you. Without this thirst you will not care to drink of it. I want to read this chapter with a thirsty heart, not as the relation of a strange dream or puzzling mysteries, but as news from my home which it interests me to dwell upon.

7. He that overcometh shall inherit all things ; and I will be his God, and he shall be my son.

We need courage to attain the promises. Our life is a warfare against spiritual enemies, whom we overcome by the armour of God. We must fight for a prize worth having. Lord, help me to be brave ; give me a firm faith, an abiding hope that not all this world's troubles can quench, a fervent love which makes me keep close to Thy Side. So shall I overcome in the hour of trial, and then be at rest for ever with Thee.

8. But the fearful, and unbelieving, and the abominable, and murderers, and whoremongers, and sorcerers, and idolat-

ters, and all liars, shall have their part in the lake which burneth with fire and brimstone: which is the second death.

This woful list begins with “the fearful.” Lord, make me fear Thee only, and not men. I acknowledge that very often indeed I have been ashamed of Thee through a slavish, cowardly fear of what men might say. I did not dare speak up boldly for right, or reprove blasphemy, or be reverent amidst scoffers, or keep out of sinful ways, because I was afraid of being laughed at. Let me observe in this verse the terrible consequences of being a coward; see how cowards here come to share in all manner of vileness, and at last in endless misery.

9. *And there came unto me one of the seven angels which had the seven vials full of the seven last plagues, and talked with me, saying, Come hither, I will shew thee the bride, the Lamb's wife.*

The plagues are over, and Babylon is gone; now the angel has to disclose the bright and beautiful vision of the heavenly Jerusalem. The phrase, “the wife of the Lamb,” expresses all the gentleness and tenderness of Christ glorified, and the true love His people have for Him. It also reminds us of His Sacrifice; He Who is now glorious was once patient, was crucified and slain for us.

10. *And he carried me away in the spirit to a great and high mountain, and shewed me that great city, the holy Jerusalem, descending out of heaven from God,*

Holy Scripture began with a garden, but it ends with a city. The innocence and peace of Eden soon disappeared, and mankind had many ages of wandering before they could find rest again; but it comes at last. All our best endeavours cannot set up the glorious city here below; do what we may, there is always much remaining to be reformed. It is a vain dream to think that any philosophies, or laws, or arrangements of property will bring perfection here on earth. No; yet we must strive for righteousness and justice, and try to mould our lives after the pattern which God reveals.

11. *Having the glory of God: and her light was like unto a stone most precious, even like a jasper stone, clear as crystal;*

The Church on earth has much darkness as well as light, but the Church glorified enjoys the light of everlasting life, a radiance bright and undazzling and lasting. God Himself imparts this light. It is true that God gives us a great deal of light here below; the faith, the Scriptures, the Sacraments, hope and charity, and the lives of saints, are not for nothing; they make up a great

body of light, but it is darkness in comparison with what is to be revealed.

12. And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel : 13. on the east three gates ; on the north three gates ; on the south three gates ; and on the west three gates.

The strong wall and gates with angel guards mean perfect security ; no evil thing can enter there, no enemy approach, none can wander away. Angels and men, saints of the old covenant and the new, are joined together in that city ; they enter from different sides, by various roads. In this world their conditions were quite different one from another, but they all are travelling towards the same eternal home.

14. And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb.

The twelve foundations inscribed with apostolic names remind us that the true knowledge of the holy and blessed Trinity, which will illumine heaven, rests upon that faith which the apostles taught while on earth. That faith is the same that we recite daily, only made perfect there. God, and His blessed Son our Saviour, and His co-equal Spirit, are revealed to us Christians here below in the faith of the Holy Catholic Apostolic Church. That faith we must cling to, if we wish to arrive at full knowledge.

15. And he that talked with me had a golden reed to measure the city, and the gates thereof, and the wall thereof. 16. And the city lieth four-square, and the length is as large as the breadth : and he measured the city with the reed, twelve thousand furlongs. The length and the breadth and the height of it are equal. 17. And he measured the wall thereof, an hundred and forty and four cubits, according to the measure of a man, that is, of the angel.

So great, so wide, so perfect ; all is in order there, all complete. How different from the strife and division, the incomplete performances, the broken links of our earthly Jerusalem ! There is room in that city above for many souls whom we cannot understand or join with here. God knows how to provide room for all His children.

18. And the building of the wall of it was of jasper : and the city was pure gold, like unto clear glass.

All this glory will remain. It has been purified in the fire of tribu-

lation, and has to fear no robbers, no shocks, no conflagrations. All there is clear and transparent ; we shall be able to read each other's hearts, and have no evil thing to conceal in our own.

19. And the foundations of the wall of the city were garnished with all manner of precious stones. The first foundation was jasper; the second, sapphire; the third, a chalcedony; the fourth, an emerald; 20. the fifth, sardonyx; the sixth, sardius; the seventh, chrysolyte; the eighth, beryl; the ninth, a topaz; the tenth, a chrysoprasus; the eleventh, a jacinth; the twelfth, an amethyst. 21. And the twelve gates were twelve pearls; every several gate was of one pearl: and the street of the city was pure gold, as it were transparent glass.

These many jewels, different in colour and radiance, express the many gifts which God's elect possess, some of one kind, some of another. All profess the same Faith, serve the same Master, but they bring to the heavenly city their several characters and attainments. May God set us at last safe within that city, that we move no more from it. The brightest gems are but shadows of inward graces with which God would have us adorn our souls.

22. And I saw no temple therein: for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are the temple of it.

No place of worship or altar of sacrifice is needed there ; God will be revealed to us, and we ourselves shall be able to worship Him directly. Let our worship here below fit us to join in the praises of that Divine temple. Indeed, God is a Spirit, and can be worshipped in every place ; but how can we learn the fit temper for heaven unless by reverence and devotion here on earth ? Churches are given us for this end, to practise a temper of worship. When we have fully gained that, churches will be needed no more.

23. And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof.

Can any knowledge of this earth give full light to my mind ? No. I must indeed study and learn all the truth which God puts before me, but yet I must look for a full enlightenment elsewhere. God and Christ shed many beams on me here, but reserve full radiance for heaven.

24. And the nations of them which are saved shall walk in the light of it: and the kings of the earth do bring their glory and honour into it. 25. And the gates of it shall not be shut

at all by day: for there shall be no night there. 26. And they shall bring the glory and honour of the nations into it.

No darkness, no enemies, no fear ; all will be obedience, thankfulness, and peace. God's servants will give Him all the glory of their salvation ; they will see how His hand has led them along the road, and opened the city's doors to them.

27. And there shall in no wise enter into it any thing that defileth, neither whatsoever worketh abomination, or maketh a lie; but they which are written in the Lamb's book of life.

Will not these words restrain me from sin ? How foolish an exchange it would be if I won earth and lost heaven ; if for a few moments of sinful pleasure or mean advantage I threw away the unspeakable delights of God's kingdom. My name has been written in the book of Divine adoption here below ; may my sins not blot it out. Whether I shall be found written in the Book of Eternal Life I cannot tell, but I trust in that mercy of God which redeemed me and has helped me so far on my way.

CHAPTER XXII.

1. The river of the water of life. 2. The tree of life. 5. The light of the city of God is himself. 9. The angel will not be worshipped. 18. Nothing may be added to the word of God, nor taken therefrom.

AND he shewed me a pure river of water of life, clear as crystal, proceeding out of the throne of God and of the Lamb.

There is perfect purity, there is full satisfaction for all our thirst. All this is expressed by the pure and crystal river that flowed from beneath the Throne of God and of Christ. In this life we can taste some refreshing drops of that stream, but the fulness of it is reserved for heaven. Dear friends, if it has been so precious to our souls to find pardon, comfort, and strength here below, with what a flood of blessedness will not God refresh His redeemed !

2. In the midst of the street of it, and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations.

In the Church below the Cross of Christ is this healing Tree, full of Divine nourishment ; but in the Church above it is Christ glorified made known to us with unveiled Face. We must begin now on earth to apply those leaves to our wounds, that fruit to our needs.

3. And there shall be no more curse : but the throne of God and of the Lamb shall be in it ; and his servants shall serve him : 4. and they shall see his face ; and his name shall be in their foreheads.

There will be no mistake there as to who God's servants are ; they will be plainly recognised for His own and freed at last from all temptation. On earth their best service was poor and interrupted, but above they will serve Him as angels do, and find their service an endless delight. They will carry on for ever that true service which they began here on earth.

5. And there shall be no night there ; and they need no candle, neither light of the sun ; for the Lord God giveth them light : and they shall reign for ever and ever.

Neither the light of the Old Testament, nor of the Gospel, nor of Holy Church, will be needed there. Books and teachers will have passed away. We ourselves in the Presence of our God shall enjoy His mercy, behold His truth, thank Him for His grace.

6. And he said unto me, These sayings are faithful and true : and the Lord God of the holy prophets sent his angel to shew unto his servants the things which must shortly be done. 7. Behold, I come quickly : blessed is he that keepeth the sayings of the prophecy of this book.

Why ? Because to have thoughts about heaven is helpful for us. We do not serve God for pay ; He is well worth our purest service ; it is good to be His without reward ; but yet it is part of our nature to feel that righteousness and happiness are linked together. He has made us so ; we can endure the Cross and despise the shame now we know of the joy set before us. The knowledge of endless joy revealed to us under the mysterious figures of this book quickens all our best hopes.

8. And I John saw these things, and heard them. And when I had heard and seen, I fell down to worship before the feet of the angel which shewed me these things.

It is a singular mercy amidst this blind and corrupt world to have Divine truth revealed to us, to know and love it. It is well worthy

of our thanks. Here are messages from our home which reach us in a far-off country amidst strife and confusion. Shall we not sometimes turn aside to read them and thank those whose words or writings have brought them to us ?

9. *Then saith he unto me, See thou do it not : for I am thy fellowservant, and of thy brethren the prophets, and of them which keep the sayings of this book : worship God.*

Those who teach heavenly truths to men will find some souls ready to hang on their words and treat their persons with all possible reverence and love. Their plain duty is to refer these souls to their God from Whom all good comes. They must beware of the great temptation to absorb all the thanks, all the duty, of any soul. We are but God's messengers ; He is a jealous God, and will not allow our brethren to worship us.

10. *And he saith unto me, Seal not the sayings of the prophecy of this book : for the time is at hand.*

Old Testament prophecies often have respect to the distant future, but those of the New Testament are for our use and profit now. One day looking back we shall discern how this world at its greatest, and our own life at its longest, are but for a moment ; it would be dangerous to delay the work of our salvation. This present time is all we have ; then God will appear to ask how our working day has been spent.

11. *He that is unjust, let him be unjust still : and he which is filthy, let him be filthy still : and he that is righteous, let him be righteous still : and he that is holy, let him be holy still.*

This grave verse means that human character will soon be fixed. O God, I know that there are few sudden changes, few reversals of character. I know that self-indulgence, and covetousness, and evil tempers, have a tendency to grow, and soon possess the whole soul. I know also that honesty, and love, and patience also grow by Thy mercy. I know all this, and I fear. While I never limit Thy converting grace, yet I acknowledge that habit has a great power. I am making impressions daily on my own heart of good or evil for eternity.

12. *And, behold, I come quickly ; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.*

This is retribution. God's government is righteous, and is based on His principle of rewarding men according to their deserts. But many seem hardly responsible ; their trial is decided for them

already ; they had little chance of knowing or obeying truth. Others again had immense advantages to begin with. Yes, the dear Lord knows all that much better than we do ; His infinite wisdom and mercy are able to apportion his due reward to each.

13. I am Alpha and Omega, the beginning and the end, the first and the last.

This has been thrice repeated. Our God spoke thus in chaps. i. 8 and xxi. 6, and here also ; He lifts our minds from this transitory world to Himself, from Whom all things come, Who called them into being, and foresees the whole course of their existence. He reminds us that we entirely depend upon Him. It is salutary, amidst all this world's beginnings and endings, greatnesses and abasements, to look beyond.

14. Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

How many souls have been kindled into love by these glorious promises ? They have longed to partake of that fruit and enter into that city, and in such a hope have kept themselves from defilement here. Glory be to Divine mercy for enlarging our horizon. We do not despise any motives to holiness, and, amongst others, we acknowledge gratefully the gracious promises of heaven which our God makes to us.

15. For without are dogs, and sorcerers, and whoremongers, and murderers, and idolaters, and whosoever loveth and maketh a lie.

The impure, profane, cruel, covetous, and false are shut out from heaven. God's Word is so. He plainly warns them of such a possibility. These last two chapters of the Revelation mingle together such grave terrors and such sweet comforts. The golden city is so full of beauty, so winning, so welcome, and yet its doors are guarded by sentences like this. Ah, I think that some whom men admitted and honoured in Christ's Church may be found outside at last, and there are some whom men excluded for whom God will find room.

16. I Jesus have sent mine angel to testify unto you these things in the churches. I am the root and the offspring of David, and the bright and morning star.

Past and future join in our Saviour. He sums up the promises, fulfils the longings of old days, and yet His manifestation on earth is but

as the morning star before the sun rises. It heralds the glories of eternity about to be revealed. Here we are not in full daylight, but this bright star has shone upon us and shewn us how to direct our steps.

17. And the Spirit and the bride say, Come. And let him that heareth say, Come. And let him that is athirst come. And whosoever will, let him take the water of life freely.

The study of this Book of the Revelation should have awakened in our hearts a thirst for this living water. This thirst means a desire for Christ's coming, a sense of the vanity of life, an impatience of sin, an earnest longing to be better than we are. Such feelings God Himself wakens in our heart, and He will satisfy them.

18. For I testify unto every man that heareth the words of the prophecy of this book, If any man shall add unto these things, God shall add unto him the plagues that are written in this book : 19. and if any man shall take away from the words of the book of this prophecy, God shall take away his part out of the book of life, and out of the holy city, and from the things which are written in this book.

Let me not superstitiously add to, or profanely take away from, Holy Scripture. God meant me to read it, not keep it unopened on the shelf. God meant me to study its meaning, not rest content with talking about it. He has set there for me great mysteries dimly revealed, heavenly promises, terrible warnings, and has committed all this body of truth to His Church, which sets it forth daily in creeds and prayers. I desire to keep to the old ways and old Faith in which Christians from the beginning have walked.

20. He which testifieth these things saith, Surely I come quickly. Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus.

Let our hearts answer, like S. John's, a ready and willing Amen to Christ's promises. If we have such a Master we should most humbly receive His orders, most willingly execute them, most patiently wait their full accomplishment. John knew what it was to have a Divine and Human Friend ; a Heart that was his, and yet was the Heart of God's own Son. What a blessed experience ! May we, after our measure, share it.

21. The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen.

Holy Scripture ends with a blessing. The apostle desires for us that

gift of grace which alone makes us seek and live for heavenly blessings. Grace is true riches, true peace ; it comes into the heart and plants there a joy which all this world's changes cannot wholly uproot. May we who have meditated day by day on the saving words of Christ the Lord and His apostles feel in ourselves this Almighty power, this sweet love, drawing us up out of the world's darkness towards our home in heaven.

INDEX TO SOME OF THE CHIEF PERSONS, PLACES,
AND SUBJECTS MENTIONED IN THE LATTER
PART OF THE NEW TESTAMENT.

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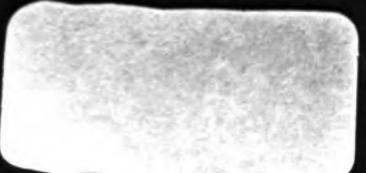


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